

Historical Materialism 60

# **Dialectics of the Ideal**

**Evald Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism**

**Edited by  
Alex Levant and Vesa Oittinen**

BRILL

# Dialectics of the Ideal

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Evald Ilyenkov in the mid-70's (from the archive of A. V. Potemkin).

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## Foreword

Alex Levant and Vesa Oittinen

This volume offers a window into the subterranean world of ‘creative’ Soviet Marxism<sup>1</sup> – a body of thought that developed prior, alongside and sometimes in opposition to ‘official’ Soviet Marxism, the state-sanctioned doctrine of Diamat.<sup>2</sup> While much of Soviet theory from the pre-Stalin period of the 1920s is well known in the West (Vygotsky, Voloshinov, Bakhtin, Rubin, Pashukanis, among others), the post-Stalin period remains quite poorly researched. The aim of this project is to introduce some of the most innovative and relevant ideas from this body of thought to readers of English in the West.

Evald Ilyenkov (1924–79) stands out as the leader of an intellectual current that sought to break with official Diamat during the Khrushchevite thaw. Widely recognised as the most important Soviet Marxist philosopher of the post-Stalin period, his ‘activity approach’ has been read as distinct from both crude materialism – which understands human thought as essentially a biological phenomenon, a product of the physical brain – and idealist conceptions – which understand thought as something independent of matter, whether conceived of as a deeply individual phenomenon, as one’s soul or individual self, or grasped as a social product, as language or discourse. In contrast to the reductionist truth-claims of vulgar materialism and the relativistic malaise of idealism, Ilyenkov’s innovative concept of *the ideal*, which draws on classical philosophy (Marx,

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1. The term ‘creative’ [творческий] Soviet Marxism is used by some contemporary Russian theorists to distinguish certain currents in Marxist theory from ‘official’ Soviet Marxism in the form of Diamat; Maidansky 2009a, pp. 201–2; Tolstykh 2008, p. 10; Levant 2008; Mezhuiev 1997. David Bakhurst uses the term ‘genuine’; Bakhurst 1991, p. 3. This ‘creative’ Soviet Marxism could be found in various academic disciplines, most notably in the 1920s and 1960s. These currents are distinguished from official Soviet thought by their departure from positivist conceptions of subjectivity. However, a history that draws out the historical and theoretical connections between these currents, which articulates creative Soviet Marxism as a coherent tradition, is yet to be written; see Levant 2011a.

2. Russian acronym for dialectical materialism. Diamat represented official Soviet Marxist philosophy, which was schematised in the fourth chapter of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Short Course)*, as ‘the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party’, cited in Bakhurst 1991, p. 96.

Hegel and Spinoza), as well as the cultural-historical school of Soviet psychology (Vygotsky, Leontyev and Meshcheryakov), posits thought not as a product of the activity of the human brain, but rather as a product of human activity. Here, individual thought, like the individual self, is understood in its essence as a social phenomenon, that is to say, it does not arise spontaneously from the biological development of an individual child, but only in the context of a set of social practices that are internalised by the child. These social practices give rise to a world of meaning, an ideal world, but one that nevertheless confronts the individual with the full objectivity of a police-baton. Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal offers an original way of understanding the objectivity of immaterial phenomena. But, more fundamentally, it challenges what we see as the truth-value of knowledge, where knowledge appears as both social and objective.

In this way, Ilyenkov's approach shares common concerns with contemporary anti-postmodernists like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, as well as with the tradition of Western Marxism more broadly, particularly in its effort to articulate an anti-reductionist Marxism. Ilyenkov's focus on activity closely aligns him with other recent thinkers, such as John Holloway, and *Open Marxism* more generally, specifically in terms of its anti-scientism and anti-positivism. There are also some affinities with Walter Benjamin.<sup>3</sup> There are many other connections as well; however, like most of creative Soviet Marxism from the post-Stalin period, his work remains largely outside the orbit of contemporary Western theory. Our hope is to make a contribution toward addressing this state of affairs; to help bring this body of thought to bear on current debates in the West.

Creative Soviet Marxism from the post-Stalin period remains largely hidden, located as it is in a blind spot between the side-view mirror of Soviet Marxism (as Diamat) and the rear-view mirror of Western Marxism. The latter defined itself against the former, and in the process excluded creative Soviet theory, despite the two sharing substantive common features. Meanwhile, Soviet Marxism, which was hegemonic for a period only from the early 1930s to the mid-1950s, effectively erased its prehistory, and produced a generation of theorists who identified Marxism with Diamat, and who became part of the establishment with whom creative theorists, like Ilyenkov, entered into polemics. This was the context for Ilyenkov's famous declaration in 1954 to the Chair of Dialectical Materialism, in which he claimed that, in Marxism, there was no such thing as dialectical materialism, but only a materialist conception of history<sup>4</sup> – a bold intervention, on account of which he was promptly removed from Moscow University. The 'Marxian renaissance' that followed shared many traits with the simultaneous Western Marx revival – for example, both Ilyenkov and such

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3. See Levant 2011b.

4. Mareev 2008, p. 8; Bakhurst 1991, p. 6.

Western Marxists as Louis Althusser insisted on a close reading of Marx's *Capital* in order to find answers to the questions of philosophy. But it was a parallel phenomenon having an originality of its own, with only few if any direct influences from abroad. The Soviet revival occurred in the milieu of the '*shestidesyatniki*' (of the 1960s generation), and expressed the optimistic spirit of their aspirations. After Khrushchev had condemned the crimes of Stalin in his famous speech at the Party's Twentieth Congress in 1956, it seemed for a while that the road to a more humanistic and democratic form of socialism had been paved. During this time, the influence of Ilyenkov's ideas was at its height.

In this period, multiple schools of thought that challenged the validity of Diamat emerged, offering original approaches to questions of epistemology, the nature of consciousness, identity and the self. This research was highly theoretical, but it quickly resonated with practical concerns, such as real-world developmental work with deaf-blind children, to give but one example. Some of this material has been translated into English, but much of it remains sealed in an opaque set of debates, if not altogether in another language.

Ilyenkov's first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, written already in the mid-1950s but published first in 1960, immediately aroused interest not only in the Soviet Union, but even in the West. The Italian translation was swiftly launched the following year by the well-known leftist publisher, Feltrinelli. The book aimed at a reconstruction of the dialectical method of Marx by analysing such conceptual pairs as abstract/concrete and historical/logical. Soon after his book, Ilyenkov was involved with the editing of the new Soviet encyclopedia of philosophy. This was quite an ambitious project, starting with the first volume appearing in 1960 and the fifth and final volume coming ten years later in 1970. Ilyenkov contributed several important entries, such as the articles on the Ideal and Substance. However, he had serious differences with the editors-in-chief of the encyclopedia-project and was excluded from the position of editor of the section on Dialectical Materialism for the third volume of the work, published in 1964.

In these 1960s works, Ilyenkov had already formulated all of the main ideas of his philosophy. The other important book, *Dialectical Logic* (the first Russian edition appearing in 1974) actually contains much material that was omitted from the published version of *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete*. In his later years, Ilyenkov wrote some more popular philosophical texts, or rather pamphlets, on various subjects, for example, on the philosophy of education, where he criticised the technocratic currents in Soviet life and culture that he cursorily labeled 'positivism'. In the late 1960s, the impulse of Khrushchev's 'thaw' began to wane and the atmosphere of Soviet society changed for the worse as the Brezhnev years, later called the 'era of stagnation', commenced. As a result, the Soviet intelligentsia, which in the 1960s had believed in the possibility of a new

and better form of socialism, grew increasingly cynical and turned away from Marxism. In the 1970s, Ilyenkov found himself in a situation of growing isolation, one that in the long run must have been unbearable. He committed suicide in his Moscow apartment in 1979.

Of all the Soviet philosophers, Ilyenkov is perhaps the one who has left the most indelible trace in the thought of posterity. The 'Ilyenkovians' still exist today as a movement in contemporary Russian philosophical culture. The relative vitality of the movement can be seen in the annual or biennial 'Ilyenkov Readings' (*Ilyenkovskie Chteniya*), which feature as many as two hundred papers. Despite this persistent interest in Ilyenkov's legacy, his literary heritage has yet to achieve the level of attention that it deserves. A critical edition of Ilyenkov's collected works in the original Russian is urgently needed, but, unfortunately, at this time no such project is in preparation. Much remains unpublished in Ilyenkov's archives. One reason for this deplorable situation is, of course, that the present-day Russian scientific and cultural administration is not interested in an author it regards as a remnant from the Soviet period.

\* \* \*

This volume focuses on a specific text, Ilyenkov's *Dialectics of the Ideal*, which was written in 1974, but published for the first time in its complete form only in 2009 in the Russian philosophy journal *Logos*, and in English translation in 2012 in *Historical Materialism* (20.2). This text is introduced by the translator with a substantial commentary, which provides the reader with some of the relevant contexts that give this piece its significance, including its relationship to classical philosophers (like Plato, Spinoza, Hegel and Marx), as well as Soviet and Western Marxists (like Lenin, Lukács, Deborin and Vygotsky). The commentary also gives a sense of the main debates in which Ilyenkov was engaged, as well as the history of the previous publication and translation of the text, and some technical aspects of the translation. The translation, together with the translator's introduction, comprises Part I of the book: 'Dialectics of the Ideal'.

Part II, 'Contexts', probes deeper into the various influences on Ilyenkov's thought. An interview with Sergey Mareev paints a vivid image of the Soviet philosophical culture in which Ilyenkov's ideas developed. One of the most important contemporary Russian theorists who continues to develop Ilyenkov's 'activity-approach', Mareev discusses a wide range of issues, including Ilyenkov's reception in the Soviet Union, his connection to the 'Zagorsk Experiment' (where deaf-blind children were educated with remarkable success), and the nature of alienation under socialism. In the second piece, Birger Siebert explores the connections between Ilyenkov's work and the cultural-historical school of Soviet psychology, specifically discussing the cultural-historical understanding of the

concept of intelligence. Completing this part of the book is Vesa Oittinen's 'Evald Ilyenkov: The Soviet Spinozist', which analyses Spinoza's influence on Ilyenkov. Although Ilyenkov can be called one of the most prominent 'Soviet Spinozists', he actually reads Spinoza in a very selective manner.

Part III, 'Commentaries', consists of four interventions from specialists on specific aspects of Ilyenkov's work. In 'Reality of the Ideal', Andrey Maidansky examines the concept of the ideal in the context of a 'heated controversy between two main trends in post-war Soviet philosophy – practical and somatic materialism'. In 'Metamorphoses of Meaning: The Concept of the Ideal from a Semiotic Perspective', Tarja Knuuttila discusses the concept of the ideal in relation to Umberto Eco's semiotic theory and his notion of the *encyclopedia*. 'Evald Ilyenkov's Dialectics of Abstract and Concrete and the Recent Value-Form Debate' is an intervention by Paula Rauhala and Vesa Oittinen in contemporary debates on the monetary theory of value using Ilyenkov's work on abstraction. The final commentary, 'Emancipating *Open Marxism*: E.V. Ilyenkov's Post-Cartesian Anti-Dualism:', by Alex Levant, aims to bring Ilyenkov's ideas to bear on contemporary theoretical problems in Marxist theory in the West, critically following the journal/current *Open Marxism*, and more specifically John Holloway. The articles of Siebert and, in part, Oittinen, have been previously published in the Ilyenkov issue of the journal *Studies in East European Thought* (volumes 3–4, 2005). Levant's translation of Ilyenkov's 'Dialectics of the Ideal' and his introductory piece appeared in *Historical Materialism* (volume 20.2, 2012).



Figure 1. Ilyenkov playing piano at home (from the family archive).

Part One

**Dialectics of the Ideal**





## E.V. Ilyenkov and Creative Soviet Marxism: An Introduction to *Dialectics of the Ideal*

Alex Levant

*Dialectics of the Ideal* was written in the mid-1970s, but remained unpublished in its complete form until 2009, 30 years after the death of its author, Evald Vasilyevich Ilyenkov. It is a pivotal intervention in Soviet philosophy, and one of the most insightful examples of the subterranean tradition of *creative* Soviet Marxism. It provides an important window into the highly contested, yet poorly researched, intellectual history of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalinist period. But perhaps even more significantly, it offers original insights into the nature of consciousness, which challenge both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism (what he called *neopositivism*).

E.V. Ilyenkov is the Soviet philosopher most closely associated with the attempt to break with official Diamat following the Khrushchevite *thaw*. After Stalin's death in 1953, a new group of theorists began to challenge the hegemony of Diamat. 'The first to emerge as leading figures in this new movement were Evald Ilyenkov and Alexander Zinoviev', write Guseinov and Lektorsky, who identify this period as a 'philosophical Renaissance in the Soviet Union'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, V.I. Tolstykh writes, '[a]t the end of the 1950s begins the crisis of official Soviet ideology, and [Ilyenkov] is among other young philosophers [who] together with

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1. Guseinov 2009, p. 13.

Aleksandr Zinoviev, Gregory Shchedrovitsky, Merab Mamardashvili and others enter into polemics with philosophers of the type of Molodtsov and Mitin'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1954, as a junior lecturer at Moscow State University, Ilyenkov famously declared to the Chair of Dialectical Materialism that in Marxism there was no such thing as 'dialectical materialism' or 'historical materialism' (referring to Diamat and *Istmat*), but only a materialist conception of history.<sup>3</sup> This view put him on a collision-course with the *Diamatchiki* and cost him his position. He managed to relocate, for a time, to the Institute of Philosophy, but his opponents eventually succeeded in isolating him and preventing him from teaching. He was denounced as a 'revisionist', and in March of 1979 he took his own life. However, over a period of more than two decades, his original development of Marxist thought challenged the neopositivism of Diamat, and inspired a critical current of creative Soviet Marxism, which continues to this day. 'It is to him that my generation owes the conscious break with dogmatic and scholastic official philosophy',<sup>4</sup> writes Vadim Mezhuev, who is considered to be 'one of the most interesting post-Soviet Marxists in Russia at the moment'.<sup>5</sup>

Soviet Diamat was the official interpretation of Marxist theory sanctioned by the state. It was codified in a text called *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism*, which was written by Stalin and published as part of 1938's *Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*.<sup>6</sup> This text became 'the Bible of Soviet philosophy',<sup>7</sup> as philosophy in the Soviet Union changed from argument to referencing Stalin's writings and speeches. According to David Bakhurst, analytic philosopher and author of the only major book on Ilyenkov in English, *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, it became 'the definitive work on the subject [and] came to define the parameters of all Soviet philosophical discussion'.<sup>8</sup> As Mezhuev writes,

To be a creative, thinking Marxist, in a state at the head of which were Marxists, was the most dangerous thing of all. This is where the state had its monopoly. It preferred to recognize its opponents, rather than rivals within the sphere of its own ideology. You could be a positivist, study the Vienna School... But to write a book about Marxism, that was dangerous... This is the paradox, you see? That is why all the talent began to leave. It was impossible to work here. One had to rehearse dogma, and nothing else.<sup>9</sup>

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2. Tolstykh 2008, p. 6.

3. Mareev 2008, p. 8; Bakhurst 1991, p. 6.

4. Mezhuev 1997, p. 47.

5. Oittinen 2010, p. 191.

6. Bakhurst 1991, p. 96.

7. Guseinov and Lektorsky 2009, p. 12.

8. Bakhurst 1991, p. 96.

9. Mezhuev, cited in Levant 2008, p. 31.

Ilyenkov's creative output challenged Diamat's interpretation of Marxist theory. In contrast to the crude, mechanistic materialism of Diamat, which reduced consciousness to a reflection of matter, he reasserted the central role of human activity in the development of consciousness. This approach had consequences far beyond philosophy and directly impacted upon the field of psychology as well as early-childhood education. Most significantly, he challenged Diamat's validity as an interpretation of Marxism and Leninism, and insisted that his interpretation was much closer to Marx's own view and consistent with Lenin's reading of Marx. Although articulated in the language of classical philosophy, his ideas had far-reaching political consequences.

### The concept of the ideal

What principally distinguishes Ilyenkov's philosophy from Diamat is his understanding of the nature of the ideal (that is, non-material phenomena, such as laws, customs, moral imperatives, concepts, mathematical truths, and so on). How do they arise? Where do they exist? What is their relationship to the material world? What is 'the objectivity ('truth-value' [истинность]) of knowledge'?<sup>10</sup> This is a question of fundamental importance to Marx's understanding of socialism as self-emancipation and to Lenin's conception of the party, as both place the development of consciousness (that is, seeing the world with 'sober senses') at the centre of their theories.<sup>11</sup>

Ilyenkov begins *Dialectics of the Ideal* with a critique of idealist conceptions of the ideal, which identify it with consciousness, thought, creativity, the mind, the soul, spirit, and so on. However, Ilyenkov's chief target is crude materialism that understands the ideal as a purely physiological phenomenon, as a 'cerebral neurodynamic process'.<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, the ideal appears as a reflection of the material world produced by the physical brain of an individual. In contrast, Ilyenkov argues that the ideal is neither purely mental nor purely physiological, but rather something that exists outside the individual, and confronts her as a 'special reality' with a 'peculiar objectivity', as 'all historically formed and socially legitimised *human representations* of the actual world, ... "things", in the body of which is tangibly *represented something other than themselves*'.<sup>13</sup> In essence, he reframes the question from the relationship between the material world and

10. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 9.

11. As regards Marx's concept of self-emancipation, see Levant 2007, Draper 1978, Löwy 2005; as regards Lenin's focus on consciousness, see Lih 2005, Molyneux 1978.

12. This was the position of one of Ilyenkov's opponents, D.I. Dubrovsky, who wrote 'The ideal is a purely individual phenomenon, realised by means of a certain type of cerebral neurodynamic process'; Dubrovsky 1971, p. 189.

13. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 14.

how it appears in the mind of an individual, to a relationship between the material world and its representation in the ‘intellectual culture of a given people’, that is, the state (in Hegel’s and Plato’s sense, as ‘the whole general ensemble of social institutions that regulate the life-activity of the individual’).<sup>14</sup>

Ilyenkov situates the problem of the ideal in the context of its development in Western philosophy, crediting Plato with posing the problem of this ‘range of phenomena’, ‘as the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he [sic] must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity’.<sup>15</sup> He notes how in the empiricist philosophy of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, the ideal took on a different meaning – as something that does not really exist, or as something that exists only in the mind of an individual – and how this meaning was challenged by German classical philosophy, returning to it an objectivity outside the individual mind, albeit idealistically.

The real materialist solution to the problem in its proper formulation (already noted by Hegel) was found, as we know, by Marx, who had in mind an entirely real process, specifically inherent to human life-activity: the process by which the *material* life-activity of social man [sic] begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming the ‘material’ into the ‘ideal’), and then, having arisen, the ‘ideal’ becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, ‘incarnation’) of the ideal.<sup>16</sup>

Ilyenkov’s review of the concept of the ideal through the history of Western philosophy illustrates the achievements of ‘intelligent’ idealism, as well as the poverty of what Lenin called ‘silly’ materialism. Most significantly, it demonstrates Marx’s distinct solution to the problem of the ideal – how it differs from idealist, but also from crude materialist conceptions.

The essence of Marx’s breakthrough in philosophy is illustrated using his critique of the concept of value in political economy. According to Marx, the value-form of a commodity is purely ideal – it has no material properties, and it bears absolutely no relation to the material properties of the commodity itself. Ilyenkov writes,

This is a purely universal form, completely indifferent to any sensuously perceptible material of its ‘incarnation’ [воплощения], of its ‘materialisation’.  
The value-form is absolutely independent of the characteristics of the ‘natural

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14. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 15.

15. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 11.

16. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 18.

body' of the commodity in which it 'dwells' [вселяется], the form in which it is *represented*.<sup>17</sup>

But the value-form is not a myth, something that exists only in the minds of individuals, expressed in market-price;<sup>18</sup> rather, it has an objective reality. 'This mystical, mysterious reality does not have its own material body [but controls] the fate and movement of all those individual bodies that it inhabits, in which it temporarily "materialises". Including the human body'.<sup>19</sup> This objective reality is, of course, for Marx not some mystical force (as it is for idealists), but human activity itself, as we see in his labour-theory of value.

Ilyenkov argues that Marx's concept of value is an illustration of a deeper philosophical insight: the relationship between the value-form and the material form of the commodity is an example of the relationship between the ideal in general and the material in general. Just as one cannot locate value in the material properties of a commodity, one cannot locate the ideal form of a material object in the object itself. However, the ideal is not something that exists only in the minds of individuals, any more so than value. The ideal has an objective existence in human activity – in the process of creating ideal representations of the material world, and the reverse process in which these representations inform human activity.

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man [sic], as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such exists only in the constant transformation of these two forms of its "external incarnation" and does not coincide with either of them taken separately.<sup>20</sup>

Just as Marx was able to grasp value as neither a property of the commodity nor a mental projection onto the commodity, but rather as labour, Ilyenkov grasps the ideal as human activity, that is, as the process of the human transformation of the material world.

In contrast to this dialectical materialist understanding of the ideal, Ilyenkov identifies several examples of reductionist theories in the Soviet Union and in the West. Although his chief opponents (such as D.I. Dubrovsky) reduced the ideal to a property of the physical brain, Ilyenkov also includes among neo-positivist theorists those who identify the ideal with language, dismissing 'the

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17. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 21.

18. As Keynes believed; Ilyenkov 2009, p. 48.

19. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 21.

20. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 61.

whole tricky Heideggerian construction, according to which “Being” is revealed and exists only “in language”<sup>21</sup> as another form of reductionism. ‘Neopositivists, who identify thought (i.e., the ideal) with language, with a system of terms and expressions, therefore make the same mistake as scientists who identify the ideal with the structures and functions of brain tissue’.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Ilyenkov takes aim at Karl Popper’s concept of *World 3* – the world of human social constructions – which on the face of it appears quite close to his own concept of the ideal.<sup>23</sup> However, there is a significant difference between the two. As Guseinov and Lektorsky write, the ‘substantive difference lay in the fact that, for Ilyenkov, ideal phenomena can exist only within the context of human activity’.<sup>24</sup> His understanding of the role of human activity distinguishes him from theorists who identify the ideal with the brain, or language, or with the world of social constructions in general.

For Ilyenkov, the ideal is not a thing, but part of a process that involves the human representation of things in the body of other things. As Maidansky writes, ‘the term “ideal” denotes a relation between at least two different things, one of which adequately represents the essence of the other’.<sup>25</sup> The question of the truth-value of knowledge must, then, be reframed to acknowledge that the ideal content of a thing is always represented in another thing, and not in the thing itself. In other words, things assume significance only as they are reflected in other things and in their relationship to other things.

This reflection of things in other things is not a mental projection onto the material world; rather, it exists objectively in the same physical space as the matter it reflects, namely in the actual activity of human beings. Consequently, the ideal representation of a material object always involves the activity into which that object is incorporated.

Since man [sic] is given the external thing in general only insofar as it is involved in the process of his activity, in the final product – in the idea – the image of the thing is always merged with the image of the activity in which this thing functions. *That constitutes the epistemological basis of the identification of the thing with the idea, of the real with the ideal.*<sup>26</sup>

Ilyenkov illustrates this point with the example of how the stars are idealised as they are incorporated into human activity.

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21. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 36.

22. Ilyenkov 2009b, p. 153.

23. For instance, Ilkka Niiniluoto conflates the two concepts in Oittinen 2000, p. 8.

24. Guseinov and Lektorsky 2009, p. 15.

25. Maidansky 2005, p. 296.

26. Ilyenkov 2009b, p. 162, my italics.

Thus at first he directs his attention upon the stars exclusively as a natural clock, calendar and compass as means and instruments of his life-activity, and observes their 'natural' properties and regularities only insofar as they are natural properties and regularities of the material in which his activity is being performed, and with which he must, therefore, reckon as completely objective (in no way dependent on his will and consciousness) components of his activity.<sup>27</sup>

The ideal, then, is not a purely mental phenomenon, which tries to grasp the real as an 'object of contemplation'.<sup>28</sup> Rather, it is part of the same reality ('sensuous human activity, practice'). In this way, knowledge is objective.

This approach overcomes the various impasses that arise from both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism, as it does not proceed from the Cartesian 'two worlds' approach, which grasps thought and the body as two distinct objects. Cartesian dualism cannot resolve the question of the relationship between these objects, and inevitably it results in reductionism: either idealism, which privileges thought, or crude materialism, which privileges matter. In contrast, Ilyenkov overcomes these dualist dead-ends by drawing not only on Hegel's dialectics, but also on Spinoza's monism. As the contemporary Finnish philosopher Vesa Oittinen notes,

Ilyenkov stresses the methodological value of Spinoza's monism, which means a change for the better compared with the dualism of two substances in Descartes... The Cartesians had posed the whole question of the psycho-physical problem in a wrong way: they desperately sought to establish some kind of a causal relation between thought and extension, although such a relation simply doesn't exist. Thought and extension are simply two sides of the one and same matter.<sup>29</sup>

Oittinen quotes Ilyenkov's essay 'Thought as an Attribute of Substance' from *Dialectical Logic*:

There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation – body and thought – but only *one single* object, which is the *thinking body* [which] does not consist of two Cartesian halves – 'thought lacking a body' and a 'body lacking thought'... It is not a special 'soul', installed by God in

27. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 60.

28. Recall Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*; Thesis I: 'The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such'. Ilyenkov sought to rectify that defect.

29. Oittinen 2005b, p. 323.



the human body as in a temporary residence, that thinks, but the *body of man* itself.<sup>30</sup>

This body, however, is not the physical body of the individual, but is what Marx called ‘man’s [sic] inorganic body’. As Maidansky writes,

Ilyenkov insisted that Marx had in mind not the bodily organ of an individual *Homo sapiens*, growing out of his neck at the mercy of Mother Nature, but precisely the *human* head – a tool of *culture*, not of nature. The ideal is not concealed in the heads of people. Its body does not consist only of the brain, but also of any thing that is created by people for people. Products of culture are nothing but ‘the organs of the human brain created by the human hand, the reified power of knowledge’, Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the thinking thing is not the individual with her brain, but the collective as it idealises the material and materialises the ideal.

Some theorists in the West – like Althusser, Deleuze and Negri – have likewise attempted a Spinozist reading of Marx. However, these are largely efforts to articulate an alternative to Hegelian Marxism.<sup>32</sup> What sets Ilyenkov apart from these theorists is the fact that he does not turn to Spinoza as an alternative to Hegel, but instead reads Marx through both Hegel and Spinoza. Far from Hegelian Marxism, Ilyenkov’s target is neopositivism. According to Oittinen, ‘it seems that the role of Spinoza in his attempts to develop a “humanist”, that is, an anti-positivistic and anti-scientistic form of dialectics, was greater than hitherto has been assumed’.<sup>33</sup> There is a considerable amount of work to be done in order to bring the full weight of Ilyenkov’s insights to bear on Western theory.

## Ilyenkov in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet theory

Situating Ilyenkov in his intellectual context is not a simple task. Soviet philosophy has not received much attention in the West, partly because it tends to be associated with Diamat. In fact, English language accounts of Soviet philosophy often begin with an apology and a justification for studying something that has long been tossed into the rubbish bin of history. As we saw above, Ilyenkov was certainly no *Diamatchik*. On the contrary, he was part of a group of theorists that sought to break with Diamat. This is part of the legacy of creative Soviet Marxism, which has remained largely out of sight, hidden in the shadow of Diamat inside the USSR, in post-Soviet Russia and in the West. However, the history of Soviet

30. Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 31–2.

31. Maidansky 2005, p. 290.

32. Holland 1998.

33. Oittinen 2005b, p. 320.

Marxism is much richer than Diamat – it is a history whose lineages continue to be contested in current scholarship, one that is genuinely worth recovering and that includes pertinent insights for contemporary theoretical problems in the West.

Diamat dominated Soviet philosophy for most of its history. However, it remained virtually unchallenged for only a relatively short period. Its ascendancy can be pinpointed with a remarkable degree of accuracy. On 25 January 1931, the Central Committee of the CPSU endorsed the platform of ‘Stalin’s new philosophical leadership’ and demanded a ‘working out (*razrabotka*) of the Leninist stage in the development of dialectical materialism’.<sup>34</sup> However, ‘the true focus of the Leninist stage was not Lenin, but Stalin’,<sup>35</sup> whom Mitin (one of the leaders of the *Diamatchiki*) called ‘Lenin’s best pupil’, ‘the greatest Leninist of our epoch’, ‘Lenin today’, and so on. In this way, a new philosophical establishment took control of the philosophy departments and academic journals – the means of intellectual production of Marxist philosophy. In fact, state control over the development of Marxist theory extended beyond the discipline of philosophy. For example, the well-known Marxist developmental psychologist L.S. Vygotsky was blacklisted in the Soviet Union for 20 years (1936–56) following the Central Committee’s resolution of 4 June 1936 against pedology (the study of children’s behaviour and development).<sup>36</sup> This state of affairs continued until the mid-1950s when a new generation of theorists led by Ilyenkov and others challenged the hegemony of Diamat.

However, prior to 1931 the state did not exercise complete control over the development of Marxist theory.<sup>37</sup> Before the so-called ‘Leninist stage of Soviet philosophy’, philosophy in the Soviet Union was the site of vigorous debates, which by the mid-1920s coalesced into two schools: the Deborinites and the Mechanists. Their rivalry dominated Soviet philosophy for much of the 1920s and constitutes the ‘pre-history’ of what we know as Soviet philosophy in the form of Diamat. Only in the 1930s did Soviet Marxism take the form of Diamat and effectively erase its own pre-history.

It is widely acknowledged that Ilyenkov’s work revives and develops certain themes from the pre-Diamat period.<sup>38</sup> However, the specific lines of continuity remain a subject of scholarly debate. In dominant Western accounts, Ilyenkov appears as an heir of the Deborinites<sup>39</sup> – the group of philosophers that coalesced around A.M. Deborin, most of whom were involved in his seminar at

34. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 91–3.

35. Bakhurst 1991, p. 94.

36. Bakhurst 1991, p. 60.

37. Mareev 2008, pp. 4–5.

38. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26–7; Oittinen 2000, p. 10; Dillon 2003, p. 285.

39. Maidansky 2009a, p. 202.

the Institute of Red Professors. Between 1924 and 1929 the Deborinites conducted a vigorous intellectual and political battle with the Mechanists – a more eclectic group of theorists that included Bolshevik Party activist I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, former Menshevik Lyubov Akselrod, the early Bolshevik philosopher Alexander Bogdanov, and that was supported by Nikolai Bukharin. Uniting this diverse group was the view that ‘the explanatory resources of science are able to provide a complete account of objective reality’.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the Deborinites ‘dismissed the Mechanists’ optimism about the global explanatory potential of natural science’ and ‘held that the Mechanists were committed to blatant reductionism’.<sup>41</sup> Deborin argued, ‘In our opinion, thought is a particular quality of matter, the subjective side of the objective, material, i.e., physiological processes, with which it is not identical and to which it cannot be reduced’.<sup>42</sup>

This debate, however, remained unresolved and was muted in 1929 when, at the Second All-Union Conference of Marxist-Leninist Institutions of Scientific Research, the Mechanists were officially condemned. ‘Mechanism was defeated not by new philosophical arguments, but by the charge that it was a revisionist trend and, as such a political danger’.<sup>43</sup> Deborin and his followers accused the Mechanists of ‘gradualist’ politics, a charge that resonated at a time when the party was in the midst of a campaign against ‘Right Deviationism’, which was associated with Bukharin.<sup>44</sup> Similar strong-arm tactics would be used against Deborin in the not-too-distant future. ‘Although they had tackled the Mechanists, the theorists of Right Deviationism, the Deborinites had failed to realize that the party now fought a “battle on two fronts.” Consequently, they had ignored the party’s other enemy, Trotsky’s ‘Left Deviation’<sup>45</sup> with which they were associated by their opponents. Deborin was attacked for previously having been a Menshevik, and in December 1930 Stalin called the Deborinites ‘Menshevizing Idealists’.<sup>46</sup> Deborin’s defeat was a turning point in Soviet philosophy, ending its pre-history and beginning the era of official Soviet Marxist philosophy, which we know as Diamat.

In Bakhurst’s account, the philosophical debate between the Deborinites and the Mechanists reappeared in some ways during the thaw of the 1950s with Ilyenkov expressing the anti-positivism of the Deborinites. He writes, ‘Although contemporary Soviet philosophers may not see themselves as re-creating the early controversy, the continuity is undeniable. This is particularly so in the case of

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40. Bakhurst 1991, p. 31.

41. Bakhurst 1991, p. 37.

42. Bakhurst 1991, p. 38.

43. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 45–6.

44. Bakhurst 1991, p. 47.

45. Bakhurst 1991, p. 48. Sten and Karev had been associated with Trotskyism.

46. Bakhurst 1991, p. 49.

Ilyenkov, who can be seen as heir to the Deborinites' project'.<sup>47</sup> The Deborinites' effort to develop a theory of the relationship between thought and matter, without reducing thought to the physiological properties of matter, appears to be echoed in Ilyenkov's own conception of the ideal.

In contrast, Sergey Mareev, one of the principal representatives of Ilyenkov's legacy in contemporary Russia, denies this continuity, and challenges this reading of the development of Soviet philosophy, which has become dominant in Western scholarship. In Mareev's account, Ilyenkov represents not a revival of the Deborinite interpretation of Marxism, but rather a sharp break from it. According to Mareev, the positivism and reductionism that define Diamat were already present in the main currents of the 1920s. He locates the roots of Diamat not only among the Mechanists but also in the work of the Deborinites.<sup>48</sup> In fact, he traces its development back to Deborin himself: 'this tradition in soviet philosophy began with Deborin's book, *Dialectical Materialism*'.<sup>49</sup> However, it was Deborin's teacher G.V. Plekhanov whom he credits as the originator of this approach.

Plekhanov, widely seen as the 'father of Russian social democracy', is also largely known as Lenin's opponent who ultimately sided with the Mensheviks and lost. However, despite his defeat in the political sphere he exercised considerable influence on the development of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union. He died on 5 May 1918, only a few months following the October Revolution. However, his followers, who eventually coalesced into Mechanists and Deborinites, 'occupied practically all key positions in the newly-created Soviet ideological apparatus and the system of higher Marxist education. D.B. Ryazanov headed the Marx-Engels Institute [and] A.M. Deborin became in 1921 the editor-in-chief of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. They determined the character of "Marxist" philosophy in the 20s and 30s'.<sup>50</sup> These students of Plekhanov, many of whom would soon lose their positions in the Soviet academe, inherited a mechanistic reading of Marx, which continued to dominate Soviet philosophy during the reign of the Diamatchiki. Thus, there appears to be a line of continuity from Plekhanov to Deborin (themselves Mensheviks) to the Diamatchiki. 'Paradoxically, Lenin's line won in politics, but Plekhanov's line won in philosophy'.<sup>51</sup>

Although Ilyenkov does not appear to be taking up the Deborinite project, there are undeniable continuities between his anti-positivism and other figures

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47. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26–7.

48. Mareev 2008, p. 18.

49. Mareev, p. 14.

50. Mareev 2008, p. 17.

51. Mareev 2008, p. 17.

from pre-Diamat Soviet Marxism of the 1920s. In the preface to Ilyenkov's posthumously published book *Art and the Communist Ideal*, Mikhail Lifshits – close associate of Lukács who helped publish Marx's early works in 1932 – writes, 'By some miracle the seeds that were then sown on a favourable ground began to grow – although in a different, not immediately recognizable form. Evald Ilyenkov with his living interest in Hegel and the young Marx (who was discovered in the 20s and 30s here at home, not abroad, as is often claimed) ... stood out as an heir of our thoughts'.<sup>52</sup> Rather than Deborin, there appears to be a much greater affinity between Ilyenkov and thinkers like Lifshits and Lukács.<sup>53</sup> 'Deborin proceeded from Plekhanov and in part from Engels, whom it is common to blame for diamat. ... The only Marxist who spoke out against the doctrinal "diamat" expression of Marxist philosophy, and even personally against Engels, was Georg Lukács'.<sup>54</sup>

Lukács, who is largely seen as one of the founders of Western Marxism, was also a pivotal figure in the development of creative Soviet Marxism, specifically as a precursor to Ilyenkov. The polemics between Lukács and Deborin are well known. In 1924, Deborin published a scathing critique of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, dismissing it as 'idealist'.<sup>55</sup> Deborin's critique was part of a broad attack on Lukács, Korsch and other 'professors'<sup>56</sup> who were denounced by Zinoviev at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern: 'This theoretical revisionism cannot be allowed to pass with impunity. Neither will we tolerate our Hungarian Comrade Lukacs doing the same thing in the domain of philosophy and sociology. ... We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism in our Communist International'.<sup>57</sup> While Lukács recanted, his 1925 book, *Tailism and the Dialectic: A Defense of History and Class Consciousness*, was written in response to these charges.

In fact, Deborin's reductionism comes into sharp relief when examined against Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Taking aim at the determinism inherited from the Second International, Lukács posited a theory of subjectivity that afforded a much greater role to human agency in the development of class-consciousness. Lukács's central argument was that activity is organised in bourgeois society in a way that not only facilitates the development of class-consciousness but also blocks its development, primarily through the effects

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52. Lifshits, cited in Oittinen 2000, p. 10. Ilyenkov became a friend of Lifshits after a correspondence with Lukács who directed Ilyenkov to contact Lifshits.

53. Although, as Maidansky 2009b argues, they had very different conceptions of the ideal.

54. Mareev 2008, p. 42.

55. Deborin 1924, p. 4.

56. Rees 2000, p. 25.

57. G. Zinoviev, cited in Rees 2000, p. 25.

of the transformation of activity into the commodity, labour-power. He argued that the role of the Communist Party is to intervene in this dynamic in various ways, including counter-organising the activity of its members, by creating what he called a 'world of activity'.<sup>58</sup> In *Tailism and the Dialectic*, Lukács tried to demonstrate that this view was consistent with Lenin's organisational approach over the determinism of the Second International and the Mensheviks. In broadening the notion of activity from the labour-process to political practice and organisation,<sup>59</sup> he went beyond Deborin's reductionism, prefiguring Ilyenkov's work by several decades.

Ilyenkov's proper context in the development of Soviet Marxism continues to be a subject of debate. The role of Deborin and Lukács is contested,<sup>60</sup> as is the role of Lenin. Ilyenkov considered himself a Leninist, although his 'Leninism' may confuse the Western reader who might associate Leninism with the notion of the vanguard party. In fact, Ilyenkov did not adhere to the Leninist principle of *partiinnost* ('partyness'), as can be seen from various examples of his breaking ranks.<sup>61</sup> He considered himself 'a communist, a Marxist, and a Leninist, but he was not a typical Marxist-Leninist'.<sup>62</sup> His self-understanding as a Leninist can be observed in the way he mobilises Lenin in support of his concept of the ideal.

In *Dialectics of the Ideal*, Lenin appears primarily as a critic of crude materialism. Ilyenkov reminds the reader of Lenin's appreciation of the insights of 'intelligent' idealism, and of his dismissal of crude materialism as 'silly' materialism.<sup>63</sup>

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58. Lukács 1971, p. 337. He writes, 'Freedom . . . is something practical, it is an activity. And only by becoming a *world of activity* [my italics] for every one of its members can the Communist Party really hope to overcome the passive role assumed by bourgeois man when he is confronted by the inevitable course of events that he cannot understand'.

59. As Rees writes in his introduction: 'All this is beyond Deborin, who can see only the labour process as the site of practice: "the one-sidedness of subject and object is overcome . . . through praxis. What is the praxis of social being? The labour process . . . production is the concrete unity of the whole social and historical process". Again, this is formally correct but in fact returns us to the old Second International insistence on the inevitable onward march of the productive process as the guarantor of social change, whereas Lukács, without ignoring this dimension, is concerned with political practice and organisation as well'; Rees 2000, pp. 20–1.'

60. For instance, Maidansky challenges the extent to which Lukács prefigures Ilyenkov, arguing that Ilyenkov's approach is much richer as a result of his reading of Spinoza; Maidansky 2009a.

61. For example, in 1965 he was prevented from accepting an invitation from the University of Notre Dame to speak at a conference called 'Marxism and the Western World'. In his paper, discussed in his absence, he criticises the 'formal democracy' of the Soviet state, claiming that he 'writes not as a Soviet delegate presenting an official line, but as an autonomous scholar addressing the specific concerns of the symposium in his own voice'; Bakhurst 1991, p. 8. Subsequently, he spoke out against the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968; Tolstykh 2008, p. 8.

62. Levant 2008, p. 37; Tolsykh 2008, p. 8; Bakhurst 1991, p. 8.

63. Ilyenkov 2009, pp. 25–6.

He also invokes Lenin when arguing that the brain does not think, but that people think with the aid of the brain, returning human activity into the process, which otherwise becomes biologically reductionist.<sup>64</sup> He draws on Lenin on two other occasions when discussing the distinction between the material and the ideal, identifying Lenin's view with Marx and Engels, as against a crude materialist reductionism.<sup>65</sup> 'For Ilyenkov, Lenin's great contribution lay in his rejection of empiricism and positivism'.<sup>66</sup> In this way, Ilyenkov mobilises Lenin against those who claim to take up the mantle of Leninism in Soviet philosophy.

Using Lenin's authority against one's intellectual opponents is not new in the history of the Soviet philosophy. For instance, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were published in 1929, were used by the Deborinites against the Mechanists to demonstrate the latter's crude materialism as anti-Leninist.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the Diamatchiki used Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in their battle against the Deborinites. There is no consensus as to whether Ilyenkov invoked Lenin for philosophical or political reasons. However, his interest in Lenin's philosophy appears to be more substantive than a matter of mere political expediency.

Lenin is largely known more as a political actor and political theorist than a philosopher. His philosophical work tends to be overshadowed by his political achievements, and it is often dismissed as crudely materialist and identified with the reductionism of Diamat. It is sometimes acknowledged that his ideas developed beyond crude materialism, particularly in his reflections on Hegel's *Logic* in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were written during a time when he was seen to have diverged from Kautsky and the fatalism of the Second International.<sup>68</sup> In fact, some scholars have noted a similar break in his philosophy. For instance, Oittinen writes,

It is rather obvious that there are many points of divergence between Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, written in 1909 against the Machist subjective idealist current which at this time was widespread among the Bolshevik intellectuals, on the one hand, and the *Philosophical Notebooks*, which is essentially a conspect of Hegel's *Logic* with Lenin's own commentaries which Lenin

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64. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 22.

65. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 23, p. 47. Neither of these passages appears in the Daglish translation.

66. Bakhurst 1991, p. 122.

67. Mareev 2008, p. 34.

68. However, this view is vigorously contested by Lih 2005, who argues that Lenin remained an 'Erfurtian Marxist' to the end, and that it was Kautsky who changed course.

wrote down in the library of the canton of Bern (Switzerland) in 1914–1915, on the other.<sup>69</sup>

Lenin's attempt to break with the Marxism of the Second International, on the question of organisation during his Switzerland years, appears to have a counterpart in the sphere of philosophy. Oittinen writes, 'Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* can be seen as an attempt to find an adequate formulation for a Marxist philosophy that would avoid the deterministic and objectivistic world-view of the Second International'.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, Ilyenkov denies this break in Lenin's philosophy, and identifies a critique of positivism not only in Lenin's later work, but in his early work as well. In *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*, the last book published during his lifetime, Ilyenkov writes, "The conception of dialectics as the logic and theory of knowledge of modern materialism, which permeates the entire text of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, was formulated a bit later – in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. But "implicitly" it is the essence of Lenin's position in 1908 as well'.<sup>71</sup> Ilyenkov's interest in Lenin requires further research, as does Lenin's influence on Soviet philosophy, which remains a subject of debate in post-Soviet Russian philosophy.<sup>72</sup>

A major figure from the pre-Diamat period, whose influence on Ilyenkov is acknowledged by all parties, is the creative Soviet Marxist psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. The work of L.S. Vygotsky has received significantly more attention in the West than that of Ilyenkov. In his brief ten year career, he left behind an entire school of thought, often referred to as the 'Vygotsky School' or the 'cultural-historical' school of Soviet psychology. This school of thought is distinguished by its 'activity approach' [dejatel'nostnyj podkhod] to the study of the development of consciousness, or what has been referred to as 'activity theory'. Ilyenkov developed his main ideas independently of Vygotsky. However, he became attracted to this school and its practical applications in pedagogy and developmental psychology, and came to be known as the 'philosophical mentor'<sup>73</sup> of the Vygotsky School.

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69. Oittinen 2000, p. 13.

70. Oittinen 2000, p. 15.

71. Ilyenkov 2009b, pp. 375–76.

72. For instance, Bakhurst writes, 'the ambiguity in Lenin's materialism has given rise to two opposing schools of thought within contemporary Soviet philosophy... While the germ of radical realism in Lenin's philosophy exercised a formative influence on Ilyenkov's philosophical concerns, Lenin also inspired the very school of scientific empiricism that Ilyenkov came to see as his principal opponent'; Bakhurst 1991, p. 123. Similarly, Oittinen argues that the tension between positivist and anti-positivist readings of Marx in Lenin's own work stayed unresolved in Soviet philosophy; Oittinen 2000, p. 15.

73. Bakhurst 1991, p. 218.



Vygotsky's focus on activity, language and inter-subjectivity in the development of consciousness strongly resonates with Ilyenkov's views. Both theorists have an anti-essentialist approach to human consciousness, in the sense that consciousness does not develop spontaneously along with the development of the human brain in the body of a child, but rather consciousness is in its essence a social product. In Vygotsky's account, children develop 'higher mental functions' as they develop the ability to speak, that is, as they internalise the system of signs they inhabit. Vygotsky writes, 'The system of signs restructures the whole psychological process and enables the child to master her movement. . . . This development represents a fundamental break with the natural history of behaviour and initiates the transition from the primitive behaviour of animals to the higher intellectual activity of humans'.<sup>74</sup> A new type of perception develops with this break, which Vygotsky calls 'meaningful perception', as opposed to 'natural perception'.<sup>75</sup> Natural perception is the perception of animals and humans without speech. It involves a passive response to stimuli in one's immediate visual field. Meaningful perception, on the other hand, involves an active response to stimuli that has been organised by language. It is active because one is not simply responding to reorganised stimuli, but is instead engaged in organising stimuli through the use of speech.<sup>76</sup> From the perspective of this 'activity approach', the 'higher mental functions' and 'meaningful perception' associated with human consciousness do not arise from the brain itself, but must be *acquired* by the child with the help of her brain, and that in the absence of this acquisition the child will not develop a genuinely human consciousness.

Vygotsky describes this process of acquisition using his concept of 'internalisation', a term Ilyenkov adopts in his later work. Vygotsky argues that internalisation – 'the internal reconstruction of an external operation'<sup>77</sup> – is an active social process. He illustrates this with the example of a child who learns the significance of pointing. What begins as a child's attempt to grasp something out of its reach is seen by another person who brings the out of reach object to the child. Consequently, the child recognises her own attempt at grasping as a meaningful gesture for someone else, and repeats the gesture for another person, rather than for the thing itself. In this way, pointing is internalised by the child as a significant gesture through an active process between herself and another.

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74. Vygotsky 1978, p. 35.

75. Vygotsky 1978, p. 32.

76. Vygotsky writes: 'it is decisively important that speech not only facilitates that child's effective manipulation of objects but also controls *the child's own behaviour*. Thus, with the help of speech children, unlike apes, acquire the capacity to be both the subjects and objects of their own behaviour'; Vygotsky 1978, p. 26.

77. Vygotsky 1978, p. 56.

We can observe the same anti-essentialist conception of consciousness in Ilyenkov's 'activity approach' in *Dialectics of the Ideal*. For Ilyenkov, the consciousness of an individual (including her sense of self)<sup>78</sup> likewise does not develop naturally, but only by means of acquiring

the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity. These are the cultural norms, as well as the grammatical-syntactical linguistic norms on which he learned to speak, as well as the "laws of the state" in which he was born, as well as the rules of thinking about the things around him since the world of his childhood, and so on and so forth. He must internalise [усваивать] all of these normative patterns as a special "reality" that is clearly distinct from himself (and from his brain, of course).<sup>79</sup>

In fact, Ilyenkov directly draws on Leontyev and Meshcheryakov – both followers of Vygotsky's cultural-historical school – to support his claims. He writes, 'Psychology must necessarily proceed from the fact that between the individual consciousness and objective reality there exists the "mediating link" of the historically formed culture, which acts as the prerequisite and condition of individual mental activity. This comprises the economic and legal forms of human relationships, the forms of everyday life and forms of language, and so on'.<sup>80</sup> He goes on to quote Leontyev at length,

Thus, meaning refracts the world in the consciousness of man. Although language is the bearer of meanings, it is not their demiurge. Behind linguistic meanings hide socially produced methods (operations) of activity, in the course of which people alter and cognise objective reality. In other words, meanings represent the ideal form of the existence of the objective world, its properties, connections and relations, transformed and folded in the matter of language, which are disclosed in the aggregate of social practice. This is why meanings themselves, that is to say, abstracted from their functions in individual consciousness, are by no means 'mental', as is that socially cognised reality, which lies behind them.<sup>81</sup>

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78. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 54. 'Consciousness and will become necessary forms of mental activity only where the individual is compelled to control his own organic body in answer not to the organic (natural) demands of this body but to demands presented from outside, by the "rules" accepted by the society in which he was born. It is only in these conditions that the individual is compelled to distinguish himself from his own organic body. These rules are not passed on to him by birth, through his "genes", but are imposed upon him from outside, dictated by culture, and not by nature'.

79. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 11.

80. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 55.

81. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 55.

In this way, the ‘individual awakens to conscious life’ by actively acquiring ‘the ideal form of the existence of the objective world’, and this ‘ideal form’ is not language itself, but human activity.

This ‘activity approach’ forms an unmistakable line of affinity between, on the one hand, cultural-historical psychologists like L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontyev, A.R. Luria and A.I. Meshcheryakov, and, on the other, philosophers who in the 1960s used this method in an attempt to revitalise Soviet philosophy. These latter theorists are not as well known in the West as the cultural-historical school of Soviet psychology. They include G. Batishchev,<sup>82</sup> F.T. Mikhailov,<sup>83</sup> V.V. Davydov, philosophers of the ‘Kiev School’ and, most importantly, Ilyenkov himself, who sought to develop a philosophical foundation for activity theory, and who ‘began to play the role of the philosophical spokesman of the Vygotsky School’.<sup>84</sup> This approach continues to be developed by contemporary Russian philosophers like S. Mareev and A. Maidansky among others.<sup>85</sup> This group of theorists includes some of the current representatives of the ‘activity approach’ in post-Soviet Marxist thought.

## Ilyenkov and the Western world

This body of thought has much in common with ‘Western Marxism’. The term ‘Western Marxism’ is broadly associated with Perry Anderson’s influential work of 1976, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, where it is understood as a body of theory emerging in the wake of the defeat of ‘Classical Marxism’ and is chiefly associated with thinkers such as Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, Benjamin, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Adorno, Sartre, Goldmann, Althusser and Colletti.<sup>86</sup> According to Anderson, what principally distinguishes this body of thought from Classical Marxism is its divorce from revolutionary political practice (i.e., that its main contributions were produced in a context of isolation from mass movements and mass political organisations). However, this tradition is also defined by its shift in emphasis from political economy to problems of culture and subjectivity.

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82. Batishchev later broke with activity theory.

83. Mikhailov’s *The Riddle of the Self*, which exists in English translation, is an interesting attempt to grasp the nature and origin of the self from the perspective of activity theory.

84. Bakhurst 1991, p. 61.

85. See Oittinen 2010 for a summary of creative Marxism in Russia today, including proponents of activity theory. These contemporary theorists organise an annual conference called the ‘Ilyenkov Readings’, in which more than one hundred papers are presented.

86. Incidentally, Colletti wrote a long forward to the Italian edition of Ilyenkov’s first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s ‘Capital’*. See below on the ‘Italian Affair’.

As Russell Jacoby argues, these theorists are distinguished not only from Classical Marxism, but also from Soviet Marxism, in their concern 'to rescue Marxism from positivism and crude materialism'.<sup>87</sup> In this way, Western Marxism shares a common concern with Soviet 'activity theory', which could likewise be distinguished from 'Soviet Marxism' (understood as Diamat) for the same reasons. Furthermore, Mareev makes a powerful argument about the role of Lukács in the development of Soviet Marxism, which marks a significant point of contact between the two traditions, as this principal founder of Western Marxism also played a key role in the development of creative Soviet Marxism.

Despite these similarities – both in terms of theoretical concerns and certain key figures – this tradition has not received much attention in the West. Unlike the Vygotsky School from the 1920s and 1930s, 'activity theory' from the post-Stalin period has not made much of an impact on the English-speaking world. The same holds true for Ilyenkov. Although he had a profound influence on Soviet philosophy during his lifetime, he has not been as influential outside the Soviet Union. His philosophical insights have 'to this day remained a Soviet phenomenon without much international influence'.<sup>88</sup>

There have been several attempts to place Ilyenkov in conversation with Western Marxist thought, and some work has been done in recent years to facilitate this process. The earliest was a failed attempt in the early 1960s – the so-called 'Italian Affair'<sup>89</sup> – which reveals an interesting point of contact with the Della Volpe School. Bakhurst's *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy* remains the only major book on Ilyenkov in English. In 1999, on the twentieth anniversary of his death, a symposium was held in Helsinki, the proceedings of which were published in 2000 in *Evald Ilyenkov's Philosophy Revisited* (edited by Oittinen). Paul Dillon reviewed this book for *Historical Materialism* in 2005. Some work has appeared in academic journals in the West, including a special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* on Ilyenkov in 2005, and a

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87. Jacoby 1983, p. 524. This critique of positivism, scientism and reductionism continues in contemporary Marxist theory in the West. For instance, the journal *Open Marxism* sought to 'emancipate Marxism' from positivism and scientism, 'to clear the massive deadweight of positivist and scientific/economistic strata'; Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 1.

88. Oittinen 2005a, 'Introduction', *Studies in East European Thought*, 57, p. 228.

89. Oittinen 2005a, pp. 227–8. As Oittinen explains, the manuscript of Ilyenkov's first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, had been smuggled into Italy before it was published in the USSR. However, it remained unpublished until its publication in the USSR so as not to make 'life too difficult for Ilyenkov'. Oittinen writes, 'the foreword to the Italian edition was written by Lucio Colletti, a disciple of Galvano della Volpe, who expressly wanted to develop a non-Hegelian version of Marxist philosophy. Such a position is extremely difficult to reconcile with Ilyenkov's Hegelian stance, which, far from abandoning dialectics, strives to make it the main tool of a reformed Marxism. So, both the Della Volpe school and Ilyenkov moved away from the Diamat, but, unfortunately, they went in different directions'.

special issue of *Diogenes* on Russian philosophy in 2009, which includes an article by Abdusalam Guseinov and Vladislav Lektorsky that provides for English readers important insights into the historical context of Ilyenkov's writings.

Ilyenkov was not overly prolific, although he published several key books and numerous articles. An archive of his publications can be found at <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/>. The archive is maintained by Maidansky and includes a section with all existing English translations of Ilyenkov's work. Many of his writings were published during his lifetime, and some of them have been translated into English. In 2009, MIA published a new volume called *The Ideal in Human Activity*, which includes much of his work in English translation.

*Dialectics of the Ideal* remained unpublished until 2009, when a special issue of the Russian philosophy-journal *Logos* featured the complete article in its original form. The saga of its publication is worth recounting. In 1976, it was slated to be included as part of a two-volume set of articles written by several authors and prepared by the Department of Dialectical Materialism at the Institute of Philosophy. However, it was blocked from publication at a meeting of the governing council of the Institute, which was headed by B.S. Ukraintsev. A decision was taken to publish the two-volume set, but to remove two articles, including *Dialectics of the Ideal*. Ilyenkov's former PhD supervisor T.I. Oizerman likewise voted for its removal.<sup>90</sup>

The text was prevented from publication six additional times and remained unpublished during Ilyenkov's lifetime. Shortly after his death in 1979 the Russian philosophy journal *Voprosy Filosofii* [Questions of Philosophy] published 'The Problem of the Ideal' [Probl'ema Ideal'nogo], a truncated version of the original. Two additional abridged versions appeared in the USSR – in *Art and the Communist Ideal* [Iskusstvo i kommunisticheskii Ideal] (1984) and *Philosophy and Culture* [Filosofia i kul'tura] (1991).<sup>91</sup>

The first English translation of the piece preceded its publication in Russian. In 1977 'The Concept of the Ideal' was published in a volume called *Philosophy in the USSR: Problems of Dialectical Materialism*. It was translated by Cambridge Slavist Robert Daglish and includes a little over half of the original text. It begins approximately one-third of the way into the text and leaves out a number of significant parts, including the entire section on Dubrovsky and two important passages where Ilyenkov cites Lenin in support of his argument. Substantial parts of the article have been summarised and completely rewritten, presumably by the translator.<sup>92</sup>

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90. Maidansky 2009c, p. 3.

91. Maidansky 2009c, p. 4.

92. Maidansky 2005, p. 303. 'A few of the first paragraphs, I should venture to guess, belong to Daglish, not to Ilyenkov'.

The translation before you provides for the first time the complete, unabridged and unedited text of *Dialectics of the Ideal* in English. I have indicated some of the parts that have been entirely omitted from Daglish's translation. However, I have not indicated all of the differences in translation, as there are far too many. I have also included several footnotes to explain nuances with which an English reader may not be familiar. Following the Russian edition, I have kept Ilyenkov's own additional remarks that he included in subsequent versions of the text. These are given in square brackets and initialled accordingly. Alterations to words and phrases are marked with a tilde. At times, I have kept the original Russian term in square brackets to ensure the precision of technical terminology.

I would like to sincerely thank Andrey Maidansky (Taganrog University) and Evgeni V. Pavlov (Metropolitan State College of Denver) for their invaluable comments on the translation, which helped to reflect with precision Ilyenkov's technical vocabulary and to capture the nuances and humour of his phraseology. As with any translation, something is always lost, for which I bear sole responsibility.



# Dialectics of the Ideal

Evald Ilyenkov

The thought of the ideal passing into the real is profound: very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is clear that this contains much truth. Against vulgar materialism.<sup>1</sup>

The 'ideal' – or the 'ideality' of phenomena – is too important a category to be handled thoughtlessly and carelessly, as it is associated not only with a Marxist understanding of the essence of idealism, but even with its naming.

Among idealistic doctrines we include all those concepts in philosophy, which take as their starting point of an explanation of history and knowledge a conception of the *ideal* that is, as it were, partial, unelaborated – as consciousness or will, as thought or as the mind in general, as 'soul' or 'spirit', as 'feeling' or as 'creativity' or as 'socially-organised experience'.

This is precisely why the anti-materialist camp in philosophy is called *idealism*, and not, say, 'intellectualism' or 'psychologism', 'voluntarism' or 'consciousness-ism' [сознанизмом] – these are already particular specifications, and not the universal [всеобщие]<sup>2</sup> attributes of idealism at all, regardless of the particular form it

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1. Lenin 1976, p. 114.

2. The Russian term 'всеобщие', which is translated as 'universal' in his 1974 article, 'The Universal', carries a literal meaning – as 'common to all' – that may be lost for the English reader. This secondary meaning is significant for Ilyenkov, who underscores this point: 'In the literal sense of the word *'vseobshchee'* (universal) means *'obshchee vsem'* (common to all)'; Ilyenkov 2009, p. 225. – A.L.



assumes. The 'ideal' here is understood in its entirety, as a complete totality of possible interpretations – those already known, and those yet to be invented.

Therefore, we must state that consciousness, for example, is 'ideal', or belongs to the category of 'ideal' phenomena, and in no case, in no sense or respect, to the *material*. But if one says, on the contrary, that the 'ideal' is *consciousness* (mental image, concept, etc.), then one introduces unacceptable confusion into the expression of the fundamental differences (contrasts) between the ideal and the material in general, into the very *concept* of the 'ideal'. For such an inversion transforms the concept of the ideal from a thought-out theoretical designation of a well-known category of phenomena, into a name for only a few of them. As a result, one always risks getting into a fix: sooner or later a new, as yet unknown, variant of idealism will inevitably fall into one's field of vision that does not fit into one's overly narrow definition of the 'ideal', which cannot accommodate the special case. Where would one assign this new type of idealism? To materialism. Nowhere else. Or else one would have to change one's understanding of the 'ideal' and 'idealism', to tinker with it to avoid obvious inconsistencies.

Ivan is a person, but a person is not Ivan. This is why under no circumstances is it permissible to define a general category through a description of one, albeit typical, case of 'ideality'.

Bread is food – this is beyond doubt. But even elementary school logic does not permit the inversion of this truism, as the phrase 'food is bread' is not a correct definition of 'food', and can only appear correct to one who has never tried any food other than bread.

This is why one must define the category of the 'ideal' in its universal form, rather than through reference to its particular varieties, just like the concept of 'matter' is not disclosed through enumerating currently known conceptions of 'matter' in the natural sciences.

Incidentally, this method of reasoning about the 'ideal' can be found at every step. Too often the concept of the 'ideal' is understood as a simple (almost unnecessary) synonym for other phenomena, namely those that are determined theoretically through an understanding of the 'ideal' in philosophy, most commonly, the phenomenon of consciousness – consciousness in itself.

Here is a typical illustration of such an understanding [~ inversion of the truth – E.I.]: 'Ideal phenomena cannot exist beyond and outside of consciousness, and all other phenomena of matter are material'.<sup>3</sup>

'Beyond and outside of consciousness' there exist, however, such phenomena as *unconscious* ('subconscious') motives of conscious activity. Remaining faithful to elementary logic, our author would have to take them to the level of *material*

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3. Narsky 1969, p. 78.

phenomena, because 'all other phenomena of matter are material'. And the thinkers who place this category in the foundation of their concepts – Eduard Hartmann, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Koestler and others like them – would be elevated with the same logical inexorability to the rank of materialists. [And Narsky should not say that he understands the expression 'beyond and outside consciousness' 'in a different sense' other than the conventional one – E.I.].

Confusion, as you can see, turns out to be very far-reaching, and it is no accident [at all – E.I.] that I.S. Narsky, following this logic, identified 'materialism' in the works of R. Carnap because the latter deals with such an impersonal thing as 'language' with its 'structures', which are in no way reducible to the phenomena of individual consciousness (see his article on R. Carnap in the 'Philosophical Encyclopaedia').

Below we shall return to what unpleasant and unexpected consequences arise from such an unconsidered understanding of the 'ideal'. In the meantime, it is enough to note that if one defines consciousness as 'ideal', then to answer the legitimate question – what does one understand by the 'ideal'? – with the phrase 'the ideal is *consciousness*', 'is the phenomenon (or characteristic) of *consciousness*' – is in no way possible without imitating a playful dog biting its own tail.

I.S. Narsky is not alone. Here is another example:

The ideal is information that is actualised by the brain for the self, it is the ability of the self to have information in its pure form and to operate with it... The ideal is a mental phenomenon though not all mental phenomena can be designated as ideal (! – E.I.); but the ideal is always presented in the conscious states of the individual self... The ideal is a purely individual phenomenon, realised by means of a certain type of cerebral neurodynamic process (that has yet been poorly researched).<sup>4</sup>

Very well. It is clearly stated: of all mental phenomena, only those that represent conscious states of an individual must be related to the 'ideal'. It is self-evident that 'all other' mental phenomena inevitably fall (as with I.S. Narsky) into the category of *material* phenomena.

However, the 'ideal' itself is subtly interpreted as a purely material, 'cerebral neurodynamic', process that differs from 'all others', 'only in that it has yet been poorly researched'.

It is not difficult to see that to 'concretise' the 'ideal' in such a way transforms its meaning into a simple naming ('designation') of a very specific, cerebral (neurodynamic) process, and the philosophical problem of the relation of the 'ideal' to the 'material' is replaced by the question of the relation of one neurodynamic

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4. Dubrovsky 1971, pp. 187–9.

process to other neurodynamic processes – a special problem of the physiology of higher nervous activity.

The way in which the problem of the ‘great opposition’ of the ideal and the material was formulated and resolved in philosophy and theoretical psychology is thus safely removed from the sphere of scientific research. In essence, it appears as a pre-scientific, speculative-philosophical (I mean abstract) method of posing the question, which on closer examination turns out to be merely a ‘concrete’ question of physiology – the science of studying the structures and functions of the brain, that is, facts, localised in the skull of an individual. Naturally, with such an interpretation of the problem of the relation of the ideal to the material, all definitions worked out by philosophy as a special science turn out to be not only ‘too abstract’, but also (and precisely because of its abstraction) too ‘broad’, and therefore ‘incorrect’.

Consequently, D.I. Dubrovsky must categorically object to all those philosophers and psychologists who understand the ‘ideal’ as something other than a fleeting ‘conscious state of an individual’ or the ‘current mental state of an individual’ or ‘facts of consciousness’, by which he understands exclusively the material conditions of his own brain as subjectively experienced (at least for a few seconds) by an individual.

For D.I. Dubrovsky (for his theoretical position, of course), it does not matter what these ‘current mental states of an individual’ are *in terms of philosophy* – they reflect something objectively real, something outside the human head, or else they are merely his own immanent ‘states’ subjectively experienced by the brain, namely events physiologically conditioned by his specific constitution naively taken for events *outside of the brain*. For D.I. Dubrovsky, both are equally ‘ideal’ because both are ‘subjective expressions, *individual reflections* of cranial neurodynamic processes’,<sup>5</sup> and could not be anything else. Therefore, ‘the definition of the ideal does not depend on the category of truth, because a false idea is likewise not a material but an ideal phenomenon’.<sup>6</sup>

[What does our author care that philosophy, as a special science, had worked out and developed the category of the ‘ideal’ *precisely in relation to the problem of truth*, and that only in this relation did philosophy’s definition of the ideal and the material have any meaning at all? What does he care that these definitions have been worked out in philosophy as theoretical expressions of *completely different facts* than those that personally interest D.I. Dubrovsky as a specialist on ‘cerebral structures’ and ‘neurodynamic processes’? – E.I.]

Meanwhile, philosophy, as a science, was never particularly interested in the ‘individual operation of cranial neurodynamic processes’, and if we understand

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5. Dubrovsky 1971, p. 189.

6. Dubrovsky 1971, p. 188.

the 'ideal' in the sense of D.I. Dubrovsky, then this category must have been misunderstood in philosophy, as a result of various but equally illegitimate and unacceptably broadened or unacceptably narrowed uses of the word 'ideal'. Then the scientific monopoly on the interpretation of this term, on the question of what it can and cannot 'denote', would, according to this position, belong to the physiology of higher nervous activity. 'Individual operation of cranial neurodynamic processes' – period. Everything else – from the evil one (namely Hegel).

[The position of D.I. Dubrovsky is really very typical of people who, having decided to rethink the definitions of concepts of a certain science, have not even bothered to understand what kind of phenomena (practices) this science has considered and studied as it produced these definitions. Naturally, such a (in this case, physiological) diversion in any area of science cannot bear fruit, except for an arbitrary renaming of known scientific phenomena and disputes over nomenclature – E.I.]

It is well known that the theoretical development of the category of the 'ideal' in philosophy was produced by the need to establish and then understand just that very distinction, which for D.I. Dubrovsky is 'of no matter to the characterisation of the ideal' – a distinction and even an opposition between the fleeting mental states of an individual – completely personal, possessing no universal meaning for another individual – and the universal, necessary and, because of this, objective forms of knowledge and cognition independent of one's existing reality [as if the latter was not interpreted – as nature or as Absolute Idea, as matter or as divine thought – E.I.]. This crucial distinction has a direct bearing on the entire millennial battle between materialism and idealism, to their fundamentally irreconcilable dispute. This distinction can be declared to be 'of no matter to the characterisation of the ideal' only out of complete ignorance of the history of this dispute. The problem of the ideal has always been an aspect of the problem of the objectivity ('truth-value' [истинности]) of knowledge, that is, the problem of precisely those forms of knowledge that are conditioned and explained not by the whims of individual mental physiology, but by something much more serious, something standing above the individual mind and entirely independent of it. For example, mathematical truths, logical categories, moral imperatives and ideas of justice, which are 'things' having a certain meaning for any mind, as well as the power to limit their individual whims.

This peculiar category of phenomena, having a special kind of objectivity that is obviously independent of the individual with his body and 'soul', fundamentally differs from the objectivity of things sensuously perceived by the individual, and had once been 'designated' by philosophy as the *ideality* of these phenomena, as the ideal in general. In this sense, the ideal (that which belongs to the world of 'ideas') already figures in Plato, to whom humanity owes the allocation of this range of phenomena to this particular category, as well as its naming. 'Ideas'

in Plato are not simply states of the human 'soul' ('mind'); they are necessarily *universal*, commonly-held image-patterns, clearly opposed to an individual 'soul' that directs a human body, as a mandatory law for each 'soul', with requirements that each individual must consider from childhood much more carefully than the requirements of his own individual body with its fleeting and random states.

As Plato himself explained the origin of these universal prototype-patterns of all diverse ranging individual states of the 'soul', he correctly *identified* them as a special category, on an indisputably factual basis: as the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity. These are the cultural norms, as well as the grammatical-syntactical linguistic norms on which he learned to speak, in addition to the 'laws of the state' in which he was born, and the rules of thinking about the things around him since the world of his childhood, and so on and so forth. He must internalise [усваивать] all of these normative patterns as a special 'reality' clearly distinct from himself (and from his brain, of course), and is, itself, moreover, strictly organised. Having allocated the phenomena of this special reality – unknown to an animal or to a person in a primitive-natural state – to a specific category, Plato put before mankind a real and very difficult problem: the problem of the 'nature' of these peculiar phenomena, the nature of the world of 'ideas', *the ideal world*, a problem that has nothing to do with the problem of the constitution of the human body, all the more so the constitution of one of the organs of this body – the constitution of the brain. This problem and range of phenomena simply do not interest physiologists, be they among Plato's contemporaries or of the present-day.

One can, of course, call something else the 'ideal', such as 'a neurodynamic stereotype of a certain type, which has yet been poorly researched'. But such a renaming does not advance, by even a millimetre, the solution to the problem, which was outlined and designated by Plato as the 'ideal' – that is, an understanding of that range of facts for whose clear designation he introduced the term.

However, later (and exactly in line with one-sided empiricism – Locke, Berkeley, Hume and their successors) the word 'idea' and its derivative, the adjective the 'ideal', once again became a simple collective term for any mental phenomena, for even a fleeting, mental state of an individual 'soul', and this usage also obtained enough power to maintain quite a stable tradition, which has survived, as we can see, to this day. But this was due to the fact that the narrowly empirical tradition in philosophy simply excluded the real problem demonstrated by Plato, failing to realise its actual significance and simply dismissing it as a baseless tale. Consequently, the word 'ideal' here means: 'not really' existing, but only in the imagination, only in the form of a mental state of an individual.

This terminological and theoretical position is closely associated with the notion that 'in reality' there are only separate, particular, sensuously-perceptible 'things', and the *universal* is but a phantom of the imagination, a mental (or psycho-physiological) phenomenon, justified only insofar as it endlessly repeats in many (or even all) acts of perception of particular things by particular individuals, and perceived by this individual as a certain 'similarity' [сходство] of many sensuously-perceived things, as the identity [тождество] of mental states experienced by an individual.

The dead ends into which this unwise position takes philosophy are well-known to anyone even slightly familiar with the criticism of one-sided empiricism by representatives of German classical philosophy, and hence there is no need to reproduce this criticism. Note, however, that the critics of this view were interested in its merits, rather than terminological whims, which forced Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel to reject the empirical explanation of the 'ideal', and to turn to a special-theoretical analysis of this most important concept. The point is that mere identification of the 'ideal' with the 'mental in general', as was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did not offer an opportunity to even clearly formulate the special-philosophical problem that Plato had already grasped – the problem of the objectivity of universal knowledge, the objectivity of universal (theoretical) definitions of reality, namely the nature of the fact of their absolute independence from humans and from humanity, from the special constitution of the human organism – its brain and its mind with its individual-fleeting states. Put differently, it is the problem of the *truth-value* of universal knowledge, understood *as the laws* of knowledge, remaining invariant in all diverse changes in 'mental states', and not only 'individual', but also entire intellectual formations, epochs and peoples.

Actually, it was only here that the problem of the 'ideal' was posed in its entirety and in all its dialectical acuity as a problem of the relationship of the ideal in general and the material in general.

There the 'ideal' refers to that, and only that, which has a place in the individual mind, in individual consciousness, in the head of an individual, and everything else belongs under the rubric of the 'material' (this is a requirement of basic logic). To the realm of 'material phenomena' belong the sun and the stars, mountains and rivers, atoms and chemical elements and all other purely natural phenomena. To this classification we must attribute all *materially fixed* (objectified [опредмеченные]) *forms of social consciousness*, all historically formed and socially legitimised *human representations* of the actual world, of objective reality.

A book, a statue, an icon, a drawing, a gold coin, the royal crown, a banner, a theatrical performance and its dramatic plot – all these are objects existing, of

course, outside of the individual head, and perceived by this head (by hundreds of such heads) as external, corporally tangible 'objects'.

However, if on this basis one were to assign, say, 'Swan Lake' or 'King Lear' to the category of *material* phenomena, one would be making a fundamental philosophical-theoretical error. A theatrical representation is precisely a *representation* [представление]. In the most precise and strict sense of the term – in the sense that within it is *represented* something else, something *other*. What is it?

'Cranial neurodynamic processes' once occurring in the heads of P.I. Tchaikovsky and William Shakespeare? 'The fleeting mental states of an individual' or 'individuals' (the director and the actors)? Or is it something more substantial?

In response to this question, Hegel would have replied: it is the 'substantial content of an epoch', meaning intellectual formation in its actual essence [существенной определенность]. And this answer, despite all of its underlying idealism, would have been much truer, deeper, and most importantly *closer to the materialistic perspective* on things, on the nature of those peculiar phenomena, which are here being discussed – about 'things', in the body of which is tangibly *represented something other than themselves*.

What is it? What is this 'something', *represented* in the sensuously contemplated body of another thing (event, process, and so on)?

From the perspective of coherent materialism, this 'something' can only be *another material object*. For from the perspective of coherent materialism, there can be nothing other than matter in motion, that is to say, an infinite set of material bodies, events, processes and states.

Under 'ideality' or the 'ideal', materialism must have in mind that very peculiar and strictly established relationship between at least two material objects (things, processes, events, states), within which one material object, while remaining itself, performs the role of a *representative of another object*, or more precisely the *universal nature of this other object*, the universal forms and laws of this other object, while remaining invariant in all its variations, in all its empirically evident variations.

There is no doubt that the 'ideal' so understood – namely as the universal form and law of existence and change in diverse, empirically perceptible phenomena given to a person – becomes apparent and established in its 'pure form' only in historical forms of intellectual culture, in the socially significant forms of its expression (its 'existence'). And not in the form of 'fleeting mental states of an individual', however it is expressed – as spiritualistic-immaterial, in the manner of Descartes or Fichte, or as crudely physical, as the 'brain', in the manner of Cabanis, Büchner or Moleschott.

This sphere of phenomena – a collectively built world of intellectual culture, an internally organised and disjointed world of historically established and

socially established ('institutionalised') *universal representations* by people about the 'real' world – as opposed to the individual mind, as a certain special and distinctive world, as the 'ideal world in general', as the 'idealised' world.

The 'ideal' so understood, of course, cannot be presented simply as a repeatedly reiterated individual mind, as it 'constitutes' a special 'sensuous-suprasensuous' reality within which is discovered much that cannot be found in each individual mind, taken separately.

Nevertheless, it is the *world of representations*, and not the actual (material) world, as it exists prior to, beyond and independent of a person or humanity. It is the real (material) world, *as it is represented* in historically established and historically changing *social (collective) consciousness*, in 'collective' impersonal [безличном] 'reason', in historically established forms of expression of this 'reason'. In part, it is in language – in its vocabulary, and in its grammatical and syntactical patterns that fasten words together. Further to language, it also exists in all other forms of *expression* of socially significant representations, in all other forms of *representation*. Including the form of a ballet performance – which manages, as is well known, without a verbal text.

This is why German classical philosophy made such a huge step forward in the scientific comprehension of the nature of the 'ideal' – in its actual fundamental opposition to the *material in general*, including that material organ in the human body, which helps to 'idealise' the real world, namely the brain, imprisoned in the human head. For the first time since Plato, philosophy ceased to understand 'ideality' as narrowly mental, as in English empiricism, and understood well enough that in no way can the *ideal in general* be reduced to a simple sum of the 'mental states of individuals', and thus interpreted simply as the collective name for these 'states'.

This idea is quite well articulated in Hegel in the form of 'spirit in general', in the full sense of the concept – as 'universal spirit', as 'objective spirit', even more so as 'absolute spirit', and in no way can it be represented or understood as a repeatedly reiterated individual 'soul', that is to say, the 'mind'. And if the problem of 'ideality' generally coincides with the problem of the 'mental in general', then the 'mental' (the 'ideal') generally confronts the 'natural' not as a separate self against the 'rest', but as a much more stable and durable reality, which persists despite the fact that individual selves arise and vanish, sometimes leaving a trace in it, and sometimes without a trace, not even touching 'ideality', 'spirit'!

Hegel therefore sees Plato's service to philosophy in that 'the reality of mind that is, of mind as opposed to nature appeared in its highest truth as the organisation of a state',<sup>7</sup> and not as the organisation of some single soul, or the mind of an individual, moreover, not as a separate brain.

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7. Hegel 1894, p. 90.



(It should be noted parenthetically that by the 'state' Hegel, like Plato, understands, in this case, not only the well-known political organisation, not the state in the current sense of this term [only – E.I.], but the whole general ensemble of social institutions that regulate the life-activity of the individual – as well as its household, moral, intellectual and aesthetic manifestations – in a word, everything that constitutes a distinctive culture of a 'certain polis', a state, everything that is presently called the culture of a people or its 'intellectual culture' in particular, the laws of living in the current polis in general; the 'laws' in the sense that Plato's Socrates discusses. This should be kept in mind in order to correctly understand the meaning of Hegel's praise of Plato).

As long as the question of the relationship of the 'ideal' to the 'real' is understood narrowly and psychologically, as the question of the relationship of a single soul with its states 'to everything else', it simply cannot even be correctly and clearly stated, let alone resolved. The issue is that another separate 'soul' automatically falls into the category of 'everything else', namely *the material, the real*. Moreover, the entire set of these 'souls', organised into a certain unified intellectual formation – the *intellectual culture* of a given people, the state or a whole epoch, can in no way, even in the limit case, be understood as a repeatedly reiterated 'separate soul', because in this case it is obvious that the whole is irreducible to the sum of its 'parts', and is not simply a repeatedly reiterated 'part'. The intricate shape of the Gothic cathedral is not at all like the shape of bricks, from the set of which it is built; it is also the same here.

In addition, for each individual soul another soul is never and in no way directly given as 'ideal'; one soul confronts another only as a set of its own *palpably-embodied, directly-material manifestations* – at least in the form of gestures, facial expressions, words or actions, or, in our time, even drafts of oscillograms, graphically depicting the electrochemical activity of the brain. But this is already not the 'ideal', but its outward corporeal expression, manifestation, so to speak, a 'projection' on matter, something 'material'. Strictly speaking, the ideal, according to this view, is present only in *introspection*, in the self-observation of an 'individual soul', as the intimate mental state of the one and only, namely 'my', self. Hence for empiricism there is the generally fatal, principally irresolvable and notorious problem of 'the other I' – 'does it exist at all?' For this reason, coherent empiricism is to this day unable to get out of the impasse of solipsism, and must accept this most foolish philosophical arrangement by deliberately setting out the principle of the 'methodological solipsism' of Rudolf Carnap and all of his – maybe not so frank – followers.

Consequently, fully developed empiricism (neo-positivism) declared the question of the relation of the ideal *in general* to the material *in general*, that is, the only correctly posed question – a 'pseudo-problem'. Yes, on such shaky ground as the 'mental states of an individual', this question cannot even be posed, it

cannot even be intelligibly formulated. The very concept of the 'ideal in general' (like the 'material in general') becomes an impossibility – it is construed as 'a pseudo-concept', as a concept without a 'denotation', without an object – as a theoretical fiction, as a scientifically indeterminable mirage; at best, as a tolerable hypothesis, as a traditional 'figure of speech' or 'mode of speech'.

Hence, the term the 'ideal' (like the 'material') loses all of its clearly defined theoretical content. It ceases to be the designation of a *certain sphere* (circle) of *phenomena* and becomes applicable to *any phenomenon, so far as this phenomenon is 'perceived', 'mentally experienced', so far as we see it, hear it, feel it, smell it or taste it ...* And we can rightly 'designate as material' this – *any* – phenomenon, if what we 'have in mind' [имеем в виду] is that we see it – namely something other than ourselves with our mental states, in so far as we experience this phenomenon 'as something separate from ourselves'. But 'in itself', that is to say, independently of what we 'have in mind', no phenomenon can be attributed to one nor the other category. Any phenomenon is 'in one respect ideal, but in another material', 'in one sense material, but in another ideal'.

First and foremost is *consciousness* in all its manifestations: now it's ideal, then material. From whichever side one looks, in one respect it is ideal, while in another respect it is material.

Let's listen to one of the most active proponents of this view:

Consciousness is ideal in form and in content, *if we have in mind* first, its mental form, correlated with the known (reflected) content (the content of the material world as an object of reflection), and second, the realised content of consciousness ...

Consciousness is material in form and in content, *if we have in mind* another pair of the above-mentioned juxtapositions. But apart from that, consciousness is material in form and ideal in content, especially *if we have in mind* the correlation of the material form in the sense of the neurophysiological processes and the mental content in the sense of the 'inner world' of the subject.

Thus, much depends on what is meant by 'form' and 'content' in a given case. The meaning of the 'ideal' and the 'material' change accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

With this explanation, the concepts of the 'ideal' and the 'material' cease to be theoretical categories expressing two strictly defined *categories of objectively distinct phenomena*, and become just buzzwords that 'have in mind' one thing or another, depending on the circumstances and depending on 'what is meant' by these buzzwords.

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8. Narsky 1969, p. 74, italics – E.I.

Of course, if the word 'consciousness' is used to mean not consciousness, but rather 'neurophysiological processes', consciousness then turns out to be 'material'. But if one uses 'neurophysiological processes' to mean *consciousness*, one would then have to define neurophysiological processes as *ideal* phenomena.

Very simple. Of course, if by the word 'ideal' we were to *have in mind the material*, we would then obtain the same result as if by the word 'material' we were to 'have in mind' the *ideal*... What is true is true. Only these word games cannot be called dialectics, let alone materialist. We must not forget that the 'ideal' and the 'material' are not just 'terms' to which opposite meanings can be attached, but are instead fundamentally opposite *categories of phenomena*, rigorously and objectively defined in scientific philosophy, and that *to call* consciousness 'material' means to carry out an unacceptable blurring of boundaries between one and the other, *between idealism and materialism*. V.I. Lenin specifically underscored this point.

The real problem of the mutual transformation of the 'ideal' and the 'material' *occurring in the course of an actual process* – that very transformation and the study thereof, whose importance was noted by Lenin – here [purely sophistically – E.I.] becomes a verbal problem, which, naturally, is solved by purely verbal procedures [~tricks – E.I.], due to the fact that in one case what is called 'ideal' is in the other case called 'material', and vice versa.

The real materialist solution to the problem in its proper formulation (already noted by Hegel) was found, as we know, by Marx, who 'had in mind' an entirely real process, specifically inherent to human life-activity: the process by which the *material* life-activity of social man begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming the 'material' into the 'ideal'), and then, having arisen, the 'ideal' becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, 'incarnation') of the ideal.

These two actually opposite processes eventually lock into more or less pronounced cycles, and the end of one process becomes the beginning of the other, opposite one, which leads in the end to the motion of a spiral shape with all its ensuing dialectical consequences.

A very important fact is that this process – the transformation of the 'material' into the 'ideal', and then back, which constantly closes in 'on itself' into more and more cycles, spirals – is highly specific to the socio-historical life-activity of human beings.

To an animal, with its life-activity, it is foreign and unknown – and therefore there cannot be any serious talk about the problem of the 'ideal' with respect to animals, however highly developed the latter may be.

Although it goes without saying, highly developed animals have *minds*, a *mental form of reflection* of the surrounding environment, and therefore, in theory, one could find the scent of the 'ideal' even among animals, if by the 'ideal' one means all mentality, and not only that singular form characteristic only of the human mind, *of the socio-human 'spirit', of the human head*.

By the way, in Marx, the issue is about this and only this, and by the 'ideal' he does not mean all mentality, but a much more specific formation – the form of socio-human mentality.

The ideal for Marx 'is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought'.<sup>9</sup>

It must be specified that for an understanding of Marx's position this expression can be correctly understood only if one 'has in mind' that it is expressed in the context of a polemic *with the Hegelian* interpretation of the 'ideal', and outside of this very specific context its specific meaning is lost.

And if one loses sight of this context, namely the principal differences between Marx's and Hegel's respective explanations of the 'ideal', and turns Marx's position into the *definitive* 'concept of the ideal', then this position, having lost its actual specific meaning, will acquire an entirely different, alien one, that is to say, it will be interpreted entirely falsely.

It is very often understood (interpreted) in a vulgar-materialist spirit, and, of course, one need only understand the 'human head', referred to by Marx, as an anatomic and physiological organ of the body of the species *homo sapiens*, that is to say, as a set of material phenomena, located under the cranial cap of the individual – everything else will then follow automatically. The formal possibility of such an interpretation was quite accurately revealed and subsequently rejected by Todor Pavlov:

Sometimes it (the ideal – E.I.) is read behaviouristically, and the transposition and processing are taken as purely physiological or other material processes. With this interpretation of Marx's thought, it could also be related to an automatic device and the operation of various human-made or natural control systems. In this case, mentality, consciousness, thought, not to mention creative thought, truly turn out to be unnecessary concepts.<sup>10</sup>

As a direct consequence of this reading, the 'ideal' comes to be understood in terms of cybernetics, information theory and other physical-mathematical and technical disciplines. It begins to appear as a certain type of 'code', as a result of 'coding' and 'decoding', converting some 'signals' into other 'signals',

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9. Marx 1996a, p. 21.

10. Pavlov 1966, pp. 167–8.

and so on and so forth. Naturally, an infinite number of *purely material* processes and events that are observable in blocks of electro-technical devices, machines and apparatuses fall within the framework of *such an understanding* of the 'ideal', and in the end all those purely physical phenomena, which are in one way or another related by the interconnection of one material system with another material system, producing in the other system some purely material changes.

As a result, not a trace is left of the concept of the 'ideal', and Todor Pavlov rightly criticises this way of reasoning in that it irrevocably leads away from the subject of discussion of the 'ideal' in Marx, that is to say, toward extreme abstraction and ambiguous terminology.

Terms such as 'isomorphism', 'homorphism', 'neurodynamic model' and so on, will not be of help in this case. All this is simply *not about that*, not about that subject, not about that concretely understood category of phenomena that Marx denoted by the term 'ideal'. It is simply about something else. In the best case, it is about those *material prerequisites*, without the presence of which 'ideality', as a specific form of reflection of the external world by the *human* head, could not have arisen and come to life.

But it is not about the actual ideal. It is not about that kind of product that results from the 'transposition' and 'translation' [переработки] of the material by the human – and only the human – head. It is not about those concrete-specific forms in which the 'material in general' appears in this specific product of *human* life-activity.

For a correctly understood category of the 'ideal' includes precisely those – and only those – forms of reflection that specifically distinguish humans, and are completely alien and unknown to any animal, even one with a highly developed higher nervous system, activity and psychology. Precisely these – and only these – specific forms of reflection of the external world by the *human* head have always been investigated by the science of philosophy under the designation: 'ideal' forms of mental activity; it retained this term precisely for the sake of their delimitation from all others. Otherwise, this word completely loses its concrete-scientific meaning, its meaning as a scientific category.

This is exactly the same situation as with the meaning of 'labour'. During the time when political economy, through its classical representatives, seriously tried to solve the problem of value, it clearly understood 'labour' as always being human labour. As soon as bourgeois science discovered its own bankruptcy and became completely lost in contradictions by this ticklish problem, it was forced onto the path of emptying out the meaning from the fundamental concepts of the labour theory of value. And then, having preserved the term 'labour', it came to understand by this term the labour of an ass, harnessed to a cart, and

the labour of the wind, of the rotating spokes of a windmill, and the labour of steam, of the moving piston, and the labour of all natural forces that humans have harnessed to serve them in the process of their labour, in the process of 'the production of value'...

And the sun and the wind began (presumably within the scope of this conception) to produce 'value'. And human labour – that too is equal to them. But 'not only it' [that is, human labour], and not principally it.

The same thing with 'ideality'.

It is not by chance that Marx returns to the problem of the 'ideal' in relation to the problem of value, the *value-form*. These problems proved to be entangled in a single knot. It was impossible to disentangle one without disentangling the other.

For the *value-form*, as demonstrated with indisputable clarity by the most critical theoretical analysis of its features, turned out to be *ideal*, in the most strict and precise sense of this concept expressing this conception of the term.

The fact is that *any* sensuously perceptible object that satisfies a human need, any 'use value', can assume the 'value-form'. This is a purely universal form, completely indifferent to any sensuously perceptible material of its 'incarnation' [вплочения], of its 'materialisation'. The value-form is absolutely independent of the characteristics of the 'natural body' of the commodity in which it 'dwells' [вселяется], the form in which it is *represented*. The case is similar with regard to money, which also *only expresses*, represents with its own specific body this mysterious reality, but is in no way *that reality itself*. It is always something distinct from every material, sensuously perceptible body of its own 'incarnation', from any corporeal reality.

This mystical, mysterious reality does not have its own material body, which is why it easily changes one material form of its incarnation for another, persisting in all of its 'incarnations' and 'metamorphoses', and even increasing with this its own 'incorporeal body', controlling the fate and movement of all those individual bodies that it inhabits, in which it temporarily 'materialises', including the human body.

Virtually all those characteristics, which traditional philosophy and theology attributed to the 'soul': universality, incorporeality, elusive of the most precise physical and chemical methods of detection, and at the same time an omnipotent power commanding the fate of things and people – all this confronted theoretical thought in the form of definitions of the value-form, as undeniable, subject to no doubt (even Cartesian, even Hume's), persisting, *reality*. Objectivity in the sense of Kant, in the sense of Plato, and in the sense of Hegel.

But here metaphysical (non-dialectical) and, moreover, vulgar materialism found itself in an unpleasant situation. Furthermore, it suffered complete

theoretical bankruptcy, falling into the vice-grip of an insoluble dilemma. Either deny doubtlessly existing objective reality, or bow down to Plato, and then to Berkeley.

Take your pick, but 'value' is not the 'soul' of priests and theologians. If priests were barely able to interpret the 'soul' as an entirely material organ of the human body (the brain), as a mystical-priestly definition, then this explanation did not pass in the case of 'value'.

And it will not pass, regardless of the achievements counted among the assets of scientific study of the human brain.

The value-form is *completely* ideal. And this in no way means that it exists only in consciousness, inside the physiologically interpreted 'human head', as a mental-physiological phenomenon, as a cerebral, neurodynamic phenomenon, of a definite 'though still poorly investigated' type. Such an explanation would be, precisely, a one hundred percent idealist explanation of history from the perspective of the silliest variety of idealism – *physiological idealism*, an interpretation of a socio-historical process, and that in its most important commodity-capitalist phase.

We would very much like to ask D.I. Dubrovsky and I.S. Narsky a delicate question: in what way would they philosophically orient political economy, faced with the mystery of the ideality of the value-form, if they continued to insist on their own understanding of 'ideality', on their own answer to the question – what is the ideal, and where is it to be found?

*Of course, it is inadmissible and absurd to speak of any 'ideal' without man, with his human 'head', not only from the perspective of Marx's materialism, but from any materialism that accounts for the words it is using.*

But this in no way means that it is to be 'found in the head', deep in the bulk of the cerebral cortex. Although it does not exist without the brain and the head, and theorists who do not understand this difference must be reminded of this indisputable fact, that not only the 'ideal', but the totality [совокупность] of *material relations of production* cannot exist without man with his human head. And even the very forces of production.

Following from the above, we can see with how much accuracy and acuity V.I. Lenin formulated the dialectical-materialist understanding of the relationship between thought and the brain.

*Man thinks with the aid of the brain* – that is the Leninist formula.

Not the 'brain' itself, as the physiologists and cyberneticists who think one-sidedly on this issue claim and believe. And this is a principal difference.

Yes, it is not the brain that thinks, but an individual with the aid of the brain – an individual who is entwined in a net of social relations, always mediated by material objects, created by man for man. The brain is but the material, anatomical-physiological organ of this labour, mental labour, that is to say,

intellectual labour. The product of this special labour is precisely the ideal. And not the material changes within the brain itself.

The relationship here is exactly the same as the relationship between a person and his own hand: the hand does not work, but a person works with the aid of the hand. And the product of his labour is not 'found in the hand', not inside it, but in that substance of nature that is worked upon, that is to say, the form of substance outside of the hand, and not as the form of the hand itself with its five fingers.

It is exactly the same here. The person thinks with the aid of the brain, but the product of this labour is in no way the material changes in the system of 'cerebral structures', but changes in the system of intellectual culture, in its forms and structures, in the system of *patterns and images of the external world*.

Therefore, having drafted (whether on paper or only in the imagination) a circumference, or, say, a pyramid, man is able to investigate this ideal geometrical representation as a specific object, discovering new properties in it, even though he did not consciously invest these properties in the object. In this way, he investigates not the properties of his own brain, not changes occurring in states of the brain, but something entirely different.

The ideal – it is the pattern [cxema] of the real, object-oriented activity of man, consistent with the form of the thing outside the head, outside the brain.

Yes, it is precisely a pattern, and only a pattern, rather than the activity itself in its flesh and blood. However, precisely because, and only because, it is a pattern (image) of real, purposeful human activity with things in the external world, can it be presented and examined as a specific object, entirely independent from the facilities of the 'brain' and its specific 'states', as an object of specific activity (of intellectual labour, thought), aimed at changes in the image of the thing, and not at the thing itself presented in this image. And this is the only thing that distinguishes purely ideal activity from immediately material activity.

To think that a mathematician investigating the properties of a sphere or a cube in this way examines a representation of the flow of events, flowing through the bulk of his own brain, a representation of neurodynamic processes and so on, means to stand with both feet on the perspective of a specific variety of subjective idealism – physiological idealism – in its understanding of the ideal as well as the material.

And D.I. Dubrovsky should not forget that 'if someone were to put everyone to sleep for ten minutes, then there would not exist during that period of time on our planet' *not only the ideal*, but also the process of the production of material life with its relations of production.

Does it really follow from this ingenious thought-experiment that material relations of production exist only in consciousness and only because of consciousness? Based on D.I. Dubrovsky's logic, it does follow. And it follows for the



simple reason that he does not draw the main line between 'ideal' and 'material' phenomena where it had been drawn once and for all in the theory of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

When a theorist *writes a book* with a quill and paper or with the aid of a typewriter, he produces an *ideal* product, regardless of the fact that his work is established in the form of sensuously perceptible visible curlicues on paper. He accomplishes *intellectual* labour, and in no way material labour. When an artist paints a painting, he creates an *image*, not an original. When an engineer drafts his draft, he also does not yet create any material product, he also accomplishes only intellectual labour and produces only an ideal – and not a real – machine. And the difference here is not that the creation of a material product requires physical effort, whereas the creation of an ideal product requires only 'intellectual' effort. Nothing of the sort. Any sculptor will tell you that to carve a statue from granite, to create a sculptural image, is physically much more difficult than to weave a cubit of linen or to sew a coat. The conductor of a symphonic orchestra sheds no less sweat than a digger.

Does the creation of a material product not require maximum force of consciousness and will from the labourer? Indeed it does, and the more it does so the less the process of labour and its product makes personal sense to him.

Nevertheless, one category of people accomplishes only intellectual labour, creating *only an ideal* product and altering *only people's social consciousness*, while the other category of people creates a material product, since it produces alterations in the sphere of their material being.

And that makes all the difference. That very difference between social being and social consciousness, between the 'material' and the 'ideal', which Marx, Engels and Lenin were the first to draw strictly scientifically, which A.A. Bogdanov, for example, was unable to make out, for whom social being and social consciousness merged into one and the same on the basis that both are independent of individual consciousness, outside of individual mentality, and identically confront the individual mind as 'forms of socially-organised experience', as social 'stereotypes', completely impersonal, and entirely independent of the whims of individuals.

The fact that historically established stereotypes of social consciousness are spontaneously imposed upon individual consciousness, as an external power, and actively form this individual consciousness in its own image and likeness, by no means makes them *material* forms, forms of social *being*. They were and remain forms of *social consciousness*, that is, *completely ideal forms*.

But D.I. Dubrovsky [as well as A.A. Bogdanov – E.I.] refuses to accept them in general, ascribing them to the category of *material* phenomena. For him, of course, this also includes syntactical and grammatical forms of language, and

legal norms regulating the wills of individuals by means of state institutions designed for this purpose, and much more. All that is not ‘cranial neurodynamic processes of a certain type’. Everything, except that. Including, it stands to reason, the *value-form*.

We ask the reader to judge if this understanding can be associated with the axiomatic positions of the materialist conception of history, and what conclusions it would produce in the attempt to critically work out the antinomies of value of this ‘sensuous suprasensuous thing’, with its mysterious properties of the commodity.

According to the ‘meaning’ that K. Marx attached to the word ‘ideal’, the *value-form in general* (not just the money-form) is a ‘purely ideal’ form.<sup>11</sup>

And this is not on the basis that it exists only ‘in consciousness’, only in the head of the commodity owner, but on quite opposite grounds. Price, or the money-form of value, like any value-form in general, is ideal because it is entirely distinct from the tangible-corporeal form of the commodity in which it appears – as we read in the chapter ‘Money, or the Circulation of Commodities’.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the value-form is ideal, although it exists outside human consciousness, independent of it, in the space outside the human head, in things, namely in the commodities themselves, or ‘only in their own heads’, as Marx put it.<sup>13</sup>

This use of the term may confuse the reader who is accustomed to the terminology of popular essays on materialism and on the relationship of the material to the ‘ideal’. The ‘ideal’, existing outside the heads and consciousness of individuals, as completely objective, entirely independent of the consciousness and will of individuals, invisible, intangible, sensuously imperceptible and consequently appearing as something merely ‘conceptual’, something ‘supra-sensuous’.

A reader somewhat better versed in the field of philosophy may suspect Marx of an unnecessary flirtation with Hegelian terminology, with the ‘semantic tradition’ associated with the names of Plato, Schelling and Hegel, typical representatives of objective idealism, that is to say, conceptions according to which the ‘ideal’ exists as a special world of incorporeal entities (‘ideas’) outside and independent of man. Such a reader would most likely reproach Marx for an unjustified or ‘incorrect’ use of the term ‘ideal’, of Hegelian ‘hypostatisation’ of phenomena of consciousness, and other mortal sins inexcusable for a materialist.

However, the matter is not so simple. It is not at all a matter of terminology. But since terminology plays a not insignificant role in science, Marx uses the

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11. [Daglish translation begins roughly here – A.L.]

12. Marx 1996b, p. 103.

13. Marx 1996b, p. 103.

term 'ideal' in a manner which is closer to the Hegelian interpretation precisely because it makes much more sense than does the popular pseudo-materialist understanding of the ideal – as a phenomenon of consciousness, as purely a function of the brain. The fact is that intelligent (dialectical) idealism, which is the idealism of Plato and Hegel, is much closer to the essence of the matter than a popular, superficial and vulgar ('silly', as Lenin called it) materialism. The fact is that Hegel's system theoretically expressed, albeit in inverted form, the dialectical transformation of the ideal into the material and vice versa, which was never even suspected by metaphysical [~'silly' – E.I.] materialism, which remained stuck in crude, non-dialectical oppositions.

The popular meaning of the ideal cannot imagine what subtle traps had been prepared by the dialectics of these categories.

Marx, however, having had substantial training in Hegelian dialectics, was not so naïve as the 'popular' materialists. His materialism had been enriched by all the achievements of philosophical thought from Kant to Hegel. This explains the fact that in the Hegelian notion of the ideal structure of the universe, existing outside the human head (and outside consciousness), Marx was able to see not simply 'idealist nonsense', not simply the philosophical version of religious tales about god (as was seen by the old, non-dialectical materialism), but an idealistically-inverted description of an actual relation of 'spirit to nature', 'the ideal to the material', 'thought to being'. This was also given expression in terminology.

We must, therefore, briefly consider the history of the term 'ideal' in the history of the development of German classical philosophy from Kant to Hegel, as well as the moral that Marx, the 'intelligent' (that is, dialectical) materialist, was able to draw from this history.

It all began with the fact that the founder of German classical philosophy, Immanuel Kant, took as his point of departure the 'popular' interpretation of 'ideal' and 'real' (actual), similarly not suspecting what pitfalls he had thereby prepared for himself.

The author of *Critique of Pure Reason* explains his understanding of this distinction with the well-known example of the 'talers': it is one thing to have a hundred talers in one's pocket, and quite another to have it only in one's consciousness, only in the imagination, only in dreams – in other words, only ideal talers.

This example plays quite an important role in Kant's philosophy, as one of the arguments against the so-called 'ontological proof of the existence of god': one cannot infer from the presence of an object in *consciousness* that it exists *outside consciousness*. God exists in people's consciousness, but it does not follow from this that god actually exists, outside consciousness. After all, all kinds of things exist in people's consciousness! There are centaurs, witches, ghosts and dragons with seven heads.

Among phenomena of consciousness ('ideal phenomena') there exist green devils;<sup>14</sup> however, any average sober person knows full well that – outside of the consciousness of an inebriated alcoholic – they do not exist, and that by 'green devils' he means entirely different objects.

If Kant only had known what a subtle trap he had prepared for himself with his imprudent example of 'real', 'actual' talers! In a neighbouring country, where the currency is not talers, but roubles or franks, it would be popularly explained to him that he had in his pocket not 'actual talers', but only *symbols* [знаки представления] stamped on paper, which carry an obligation only for Prussian subjects. Of course, if one acknowledges as 'actual' and 'real' only what is authorised by the decrees of the Prussian king, affirmed by his signature and seal, and discounts all else as other-worldly fictions, then Kant's example proves what Kant wanted it to prove. However, if one takes a somewhat broader view of the 'real' and the 'ideal', then it proves precisely the opposite. Namely, Kant does not refute, but affirms that very 'ontological proof of the existence of god', which he declared to be a typical example of an erroneous inference about the existence of a prototype outside of consciousness from its image in consciousness.

'The contrary is true. Kant's example might have enforced the ontological proof', wrote an author from a much more radical atheistic position with respect to god than Kant. In fact,

Real talers have the same existence that the imagined gods have. Has a real taler any existence except in the imagination, if only in the general or rather common imagination of man? Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination.<sup>15</sup>

The reproach formulated here against Kant does not, of course, proceed from the desire to change the meaning of 'ideal' and 'actual' according to Hegelian fashion. It is based on the understanding that a philosophical system that denotes as 'real' and 'actual' everything that man perceives as existing outside his own consciousness, and 'ideal' as that which is not perceived in the form of this thing – such a system is unable to critically distinguish the most fundamental illusions and errors of the human race.

Of course, real talers in no way differ from the gods of primitive religions, from the crude fetishes of a savage who worships (precisely as his god!) a real, actual piece of wood, a piece of rock, a bronze idol or some other similar external object. The savage by no means regards the object of his worship as a symbol of

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14. [In reference to a Russian saying: 'to drink until [you see] green devils [напиться до зеленых чертей]' – A.L.]

15. Marx 1975a, p. 105.

god; for him, this object, in all its crude sensuously perceptible corporeality, *is* god – god himself, and not his mere ‘representation’. And this is how the crudely fetishistic religious consciousness actually finds the argument in Kant’s example falling in its favour.

For a devout old woman, the prophet Elijah actually exists precisely because she sees him in the bolt of lightning and hears him in the rumble of thunder. She sensuously perceives precisely the prophet Elijah, and in no way his symbol. More accurately, she perceives thunder and lightning as the prophet Elijah, and not as symbols of this person. In lightning and thunder she perceives his actual activities, the actual forms of his sensuous perceptibility.

This is the essence of fetishism – that properties are attributed to an object, precisely in all its crude corporeality, in its directly perceived form, that in actual fact do not belong to it and have nothing in common with its sensuously perceptible appearance.

When such an object (be it a piece of wood, or a stone or bronze idol, and so on) ceases to be regarded as ‘god himself’ and acquires the meaning of an ‘external symbol’ of this god, when it becomes perceived not as the immediate subject of the actions attributed to it, but merely as a sign of something ‘other’, only as a symbol of this ‘other’, which in no way outwardly resembles it, then man’s consciousness takes a step forward on the path to understanding the essence of the matter.

For this reason Kant himself – as well as Hegel, who is completely in agreement with Kant on this point – considers the Protestant version of Christianity to be a higher stage in the development of religious consciousness than archaic Catholicism, which had not progressed very far from the primitive fetishism of idol-worshippers. The very thing that distinguishes the Catholic from the Protestant is that the Catholic tends to take everything depicted in religious paintings and Bible stories literally, as an exact representation of events that occurred in the ‘external world’ (God as a benevolent old man with a beard and a shining halo round his bald head, the birth of Eve as the actual transformation of Adam’s rib into a human being, and so on and so forth). Seeing ‘idolatry’ in this interpretation, the Protestant, on the other hand, regards such events as allegories having an internal, purely ideal, moral meaning.

Hegelians in fact reproached Kant for playing into the hands of Catholic idolatry with his example of the talers, for arguing against his own Protestant sympathies and attitudes because the external talers (the talers in his pocket) were only signs or symbols in the ‘common or rather social imagination of man’, that is, only representatives (forms of external expression, incarnation) of spirit, just as religious paintings hanging on the wall, despite their sensuously perceptible reality, were only images produced by human social self-consciousness, by the

human spirit [intellect – A.L.]. In their essence they were entirely ideal, although in their existence they were substantial, material and were located, of course, outside the human head, outside the consciousness of the individual, outside individual mental activity with its transcendental mechanisms.

Hegel and the Hegelians declared that gods and talers are phenomena of the same order, and by this comparison the problem of the 'ideal' and its relationship to the 'real', to the actual, materially substantial world was posited quite differently to that of Kant. It was associated with the well-known problem of 'alienation', with the question of 'reification' and 'de-reification', of man's 're-assimilation' of objects created by man, which had through some mysterious processes been transformed into a world of objective formations that were not only 'external', but also hostile to man.

Hence the following interpretation of Kant's problem:

The proofs of the existence of God are merely hollow tautologies. Take for instance the ontological proof. This only means: 'that which I conceive for myself in a real way (realiter), is a real concept for me', something that works on me. In this sense all gods, the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence. Did not the ancient Moloch reign? Was not the Delphic Apollo a real power in the life of the Greeks? Kant's critique means nothing in this respect. If somebody imagines that he has a hundred talers, if this concept is not for him an arbitrary, subjective one, if he believes in it, then these hundred imagined talers have for him the same value as a hundred real ones. For instance, he will incur debts on the strength of his imagination, his imagination will *work, in the same way as all humanity has incurred debts on its gods*.<sup>16</sup>

In posing the question in this way, the category of the 'ideal' acquired quite a different meaning from that given to it by Kant, and this was by no means due to some terminological whim of Hegel and the Hegelians. It expressed the obvious fact that social consciousness is not simply the individual consciousness repeated many times, just as the social organism in general is not the individual human organism repeated many times, but is, in fact, a historically formed and historically developing system of 'objective representations', forms and patterns of the 'objective spirit', of humanity's 'collective reason' (or more directly, the 'people' with its unique intellectual culture), all this being quite independent of the whims of the consciousness or will of individuals. This system comprises all the common moral norms regulating people's daily life-activity, as well as the legal precepts, the forms of state-political organisation of life, the ritually

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16. Marx 1975a, p. 105.

legitimised patterns of activity in all spheres, the 'rules' of life that must be obeyed by all, the strict regulation of the workplace, and so on and so forth, up to and including the grammatical and syntactical structures of speech and language and the logical norms of reasoning.

All these structural forms and patterns of social consciousness unambiguously oppose individual consciousness and will as a special, internally organised 'actuality', as completely 'external' forms of its determination. It is a fact that every individual must from childhood reckon far more carefully with demands and restrictions expressed and institutionalised by means of tradition than with the immediately perceptible appearance of external 'things' and situations or the organic attractions, desires and needs of one's individual body.

It is equally obvious that all these externally imposed patterns and forms cannot be identified in the individual consciousness as 'innate', transcendental psychological patterns or even instinctive tendencies. They are all internalised in the course of upbringing, education and rehabilitation – that is, in the course of the individual's assimilation of the intellectual culture that is available and that took shape before him, without him and independently of him – as the patterns and forms of that culture. These are no 'immanent' forms of individual mental activity, but the assimilated form of 'another' external 'subject'.

This is why Hegel sees the main advantage of Plato's teaching in the fact that the question of the relationship of 'spirit' to 'nature' is for the first time posited not on the narrow basis of the relations of the 'individual self' to 'everything else', but rather on the basis of an investigation of the universal (read: social-collective) 'world of ideas' in relation to the 'world of things'.

With Plato, therefore, begins the tradition of examining the world of ideas (here originates the concept of the 'ideal world') as a somewhat stable and internally organised world of laws, rights and patterns, according to which exists the mental activity of an individual, the 'individual soul', as a special super-natural, 'objective reality', confronting each individual, dictating his conduct in particular situations. This 'external' force determining the individual appears directly as the 'state', which defends the whole system of the available intellectual culture, the whole system of rights and duties of every citizen.

Here a completely real fact was clearly stated in a semi-mystical, half-mythological form: the fact of the dependence of the mental (and not only mental) activity of an individual on a system of culture entirely independent of him, within which occurs and proceeds the 'mental life' of each individual, that is to say, the labour of the human head.

The question of the relationship of the 'ideal' to the 'substantially material' was here presented as a question of the relationship of these stable forms (patterns, stereotypes) of culture to the world of 'individual things', which included not only 'external things', but also the physical body of man himself.

As a matter of fact, it was only here that the necessity arose for a clear definition of the category of 'ideality' as opposed to the undifferentiated, vaguely undefined notion of the 'mind' in general, which might equally well be interpreted as a wholly corporeal function of the physically interpreted 'soul', no matter to what organ this function was actually ascribed – heart, liver or brain. Otherwise, 'ideality' remains a superfluous and completely unnecessary verbal label for the 'mental'. This is how it was before Plato – the term 'idea' denoted, even in Democritus, a completely substantial form, the geometrical outlines of a 'thing', a body, which was quite physically impressed on man, in the physical body of his eyes. This usage, characteristic of the early, naive form of materialism cannot, of course, be used by contemporary materialism, which takes into consideration the complexity of the relationships between individual mental activity and the 'world of things'.

For this reason, in the vocabulary of contemporary materialistic psychology (not only philosophy) the category of 'ideality' or the 'ideal' characterises not mental activity in general, but a certain phenomenon connected but by no means merging with mental activity.

*'Ideality'* mainly characterises the idea or image insofar as they – becoming objectified in words, entering into the system of socially produced knowledge, existing for the individual as a given, 'objective reality' – thus acquire a relative independence, separating themselves, as it were, from the mental activity of the individual', writes the well-known Soviet psychologist S.L. Rubinstein.<sup>17</sup>

Only in this interpretation does the category of 'ideality' become a specifically meaningful definition of a well-known category of phenomena, establishing the form of the process of reflection of objective reality in mental activity, which is social-human in its origin and essence, in the social-human consciousness, and ceases to be an unnecessary synonym for mental activity altogether.

With reference to the quotation from S.L. Rubinstein's book it need only be observed that the image is objectified not only in words, and may 'enter into the system of socially produced knowledge' and not merely in its verbal expression. The category of the image is understood quite broadly in dialectical-materialist theory. The image is objectified ('reified') just as well (and even better, more directly) in sculptural, graphic, pictorial and plastic representations, and in the form of the routine-ritual ways ('images') of dealing with things and people, so that it is expressed not only in words, in speech and language, but also in drawings, models and such symbolic objects as coats of arms, banners, forms of dress, utensils and so on, everything from furniture in the throne-room to children's toys, and so on and so forth. As money, including 'real' bars of metal, gold coins, paper money and promissory notes, bonds or credit notes.

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17. Rubinstein 1957, p. 41.



'Ideality' in general is in the historically formed language of philosophy a characteristic of the materially-established (materialised, reified, objectified) images of social-human culture, that is, the historically formed modes of social-human life, which confront the individual possessing consciousness and will as a special 'supernatural' objective reality, as a special object comparable with material reality and situated on one and the same spatial plane (and hence often conflated with it).

Consequently, purely for the sake of terminological accuracy, it is pointless to apply this definition to purely individual mental states at any given moment. The latter, with all their individually unique whims and variations, are determined in effect by the practically infinite interconnections of the most diverse factors up to and including transient states of the organism and the peculiar features of its biochemical reactions (such as allergies or colour-blindness, for instance), and, therefore, may be considered on the plane of social-human culture as purely accidental.

This is why we find Kant discussing the 'ideality of space and time', but not the 'ideality' of the conscious sensations of heaviness in the stomach or in the muscles of the arm when one is carrying something; discussing the 'ideality' of the chain of cause and effect, but not the ideality of the fact that a rock heats up when the sun shines on it (although this fact is also consciously perceived). In Kant, 'ideality' becomes a synonym for the 'transcendental character' of universal forms of sensuousness and reason, that is, patterns of cognitive activity that are inherent in every 'self' and thus have a completely impersonal character, and which display, moreover, a compulsive force in relation to each separate ('empirical') 'self'. This is why space and time, causal dependence and 'beauty' are, for Kant, 'ideal', while mental states, which are connected with the unique and transitory physical states of an individual's body, are not honoured with such a term. Admittedly, as we have seen in the example of the 'talers', Kant does not always adhere rigorously to his usage, although the reason for this is certainly not carelessness (it would be difficult to reproach Kant for that), but rather the dialectical cunning of the problems he addresses. But despite the instability of the terminological definition of these well-known categories, their objective dialectical content begins to show through – the very content that the Hegelian school provides with a far more adequate definition.

The fact is that Kant did not fully overcome the notion of 'social consciousness' ('universal spirit') as the many times repeated individual consciousness. In essence, the 'universal' parameters of spirit appear in Kant in one way or another as those patterns, which, being peculiar to each individual consciousness, turn out to be his impersonally invariant [безличноинвариантными] determinations (here 'universal' means identical for each individual and abstractly-universal 'for all').

In Hegelian philosophy, however, the problem was presented in a fundamentally different way. The social organism (the 'culture' of a given people) is by no means an abstraction expressing the 'sameness' that may be discovered in the mentality of every individual, an 'abstract' inherent in each individual, the transcendently psychological pattern of individual life activity.

The historically developed and developing forms of the 'universal spirit' ('the spirit of the people', the 'objective spirit'), although still understood by Hegel as certain stable patterns within whose framework the mental activity of every individual proceeds, are nevertheless regarded by him not as formal abstractions, not as abstractly universal 'attributes' inherent in every individual, taken separately. Hegel (following Rousseau with his distinction between the 'will of all' and the 'general will' [‘всеобщей воли – universal will’ – A.L.]) fully takes into account the obvious fact that in the diverse collisions of differently orientated 'individual wills' certain results are born and crystallised which were never contained in any of them separately, and because of this, social consciousness, as a certain 'whole', is certainly not built up, as of bricks, from the 'sameness' to be found in each of its 'parts' (individual selves, individual consciousnesses). And this is where we are shown the path to an understanding of the fact that all the patterns, which Kant defined as 'transcendentally-innate' forms of operation of the individual mind, as a priori 'internal mechanisms' inherent in every mind, are actually forms of the self-consciousness of social man assimilated from without by the individual (originally they opposed him as 'external' patterns of the movement of culture independent of his will and consciousness), social man being understood as the historically developing 'ensemble of all social relations'.

It is these spontaneously arising forms of the organisation of social (collectively realised) human life-activity that exist before, outside and completely independent of the individual mind, that in one way or another are materially established in language, in ritually legitimised customs and laws and, further, as 'the organisation of a state' with all its material attributes and organs for the protection of traditional forms of life that stand in opposition to the individual (the physical body of the individual with his brain, liver, heart, hands and other organs) as an organised whole that is 'in itself and for itself', as something 'ideal' *within* which all individual things acquire a different meaning and play a different role from that which they had played 'in themselves', that is, outside this whole. For this reason the 'ideal' definition of any thing, or the definition of any thing as a 'disappearing' moment in the movement of the 'ideal world', coincides in Hegel with the role and meaning of this thing in social-human culture, in the context of socially organised human life-activity, and not in the individual consciousness, which is here regarded as something derived from the 'universal spirit'.

It will readily be appreciated how much broader and deeper is such a posing of the question, despite all the other fundamental flaws of the Hegelian

conception, in comparison with any conception that designates as 'ideal' everything that is 'in the consciousness of the individual', and as 'material' or 'real' everything that is outside the consciousness of the individual, everything that the given individual is not conscious of, although this 'everything' does exist in reality, and thus draws between the 'ideal' and the 'real' a fundamentally dividing line which turns them into 'different worlds' that have nothing in common with each other. It is clear that, given such a metaphysical differentiation, the 'ideal' and the 'material' cannot and must not be regarded as opposites. Here they are 'different', and that is all.

Hegel proceeds from the quite obvious fact that for the consciousness of the individual, the 'real' and even the 'crudely material' – certainly not the 'ideal' – is at first the whole grandiose materially established intellectual culture of the human race, in and through which this individual awakens to 'self-consciousness'. This confronts the individual as the thought of preceding generations realised [осуществленное] ('reified', 'objectified', 'alienated') in sensuously perceptible 'matter' – in language and in visually perceptible images, in books and statues, in wood and bronze, in the form of places of worship and instruments of labour, in the designs of machines and state buildings, in the patterns of scientific and moral systems, and so on. All these objects are in their existence, in their 'determinate being', substantial, 'material', but in their essence and origin they are 'ideal' because they 'embody' the collective thinking of people, the 'universal spirit' of mankind.

In other words, Hegel includes in the concept of the 'ideal' everything that another representative of idealism (although, admittedly, one who never acknowledged himself to be an 'idealist'), A.A. Bogdanov, a century later designated as 'socially organised experience' with its stable, historically crystallised patterns, standards, stereotypes and 'algorithms'. Common to both Hegel and Bogdanov (as 'idealists') is the notion that this world of 'socially organised experience' is for the individual the sole 'object' which he 'assimilates' and 'cognises', the sole object with which he has any dealings and behind which there is nothing deeply hidden.

But the world existing before, outside and independently of consciousness and will in general (that is, not only of the consciousness and will of the individual, but also of the social consciousness and the socially organised 'will') is taken into account by this conception only insofar as it has already found expression in social forms of consciousness and will, insofar as it is already 'idealised', already assimilated in 'experience', already presented in the patterns and forms of this 'experience', already included therein.

By this twist of thought, which characterises idealism in general (whether it is Platonic, Berkeleian, Hegelian or that of Carnap-Popper), the real material world,

existing before, outside and quite independently of 'experience', and before being expressed in the forms of this 'experience' (including language), is totally removed from the field of vision, and what begins to figure under the designation of the 'real world' is an already 'idealised' world, a world already assimilated by people, a world already shaped by their activity, the world as people know it, as it is presented in the existing forms of their culture. A world already expressed (represented) in the forms of existing human experience. And this world is declared to be the only world about which anything at all can be 'said.'

This secret of idealism shows up transparently in Hegel's discussion of the 'ideality' of natural phenomena, in his presentation of nature as an 'ideal' being in itself: the discussion is about certain natural phenomena, but in actual fact we have in mind their image in concepts and terms from physics available to Hegel (namely Newtonian mechanics):

'But there is no empty space between the bodies (*Massen*) which are thrusting and pressing against each other, they are in *contact*; and it is in this contact now that the ideality of matter begins; and the interest lies in seeing how this inwardness of matter emerges into existence, just as the attainment of existence by the Notion is always the interesting thing'.<sup>18</sup> This 'attainment of existence by the Notion', according to Hegel, consists of the fact that in the moment of 'contact' (with the push) 'there are two material points or atoms, coinciding in a single point or in an identity',<sup>19</sup> which means that their 'being-for-itself' is something 'other'. But 'being other', while remaining nonetheless 'itself', this means having not only a 'real' but also an 'ideal' being. Therein lies the secret of the Hegelian 'idealisation of matter', 'idealisation of nature': here Hegel is really speaking not at all about nature 'as it is', but exclusively about nature as it is represented (depicted) in the system of a definite physical theory, in the system of its definitions established by its historically formed 'language'.

Incidentally, this fact explains the persistence of such 'semantic substitutions'; indeed, when we are talking about nature, we are obliged to make use of the available language of natural science, the 'language of science' with its established and commonly understood 'meanings'. This forms the basis of all the sophistry of 'logical positivism', which quite consciously identifies 'nature' with the 'language' in which people talk and write about nature. And the whole tricky Heideggerian construction, according to which 'being' is revealed and exists only 'in language', and lives only in 'language', as in one's 'house', in its hidden 'essence', in its immanent power, its invisible organisation, and 'outside language' it does not exist.

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18. Hegel 2004 [1830], p. 50.

19. Hegel 2004 [1830], p. 50.

It will be appreciated that the main difficulty [and, therefore, the main problem of philosophy – E.I.] is not to distinguish and counterpose everything that is ‘in the consciousness of the individual’ to everything that is outside this individual consciousness (this is hardly ever difficult to do), but rather to delimit the world of collectively acknowledged notions, that is, the whole socially organised world of intellectual culture with all its stable and materially established social patterns, *and the real world as it exists outside of and apart from its expression in these socially legitimised forms of ‘experience’, in objective forms of ‘spirit’.*

Here, and only here, the distinction between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ (‘material’) acquires a serious scientific meaning because in practice many people confuse one for the other, accept one for the other, with the same ease that they accept ‘the desired for the real’, and the form of things for the things themselves... *Pointing out the fact that the thing and the form of the thing exist outside individual consciousness and do not depend on individual will still does not solve the question of their objectivity in its serious materialistic sense.* And conversely, it is by no means the case that everything that people do not know, are unaware of, do not perceive as the forms of external things, is fabrication, a fiction of the imagination, a notion that exists merely in their heads. Precisely because of this, the ‘sensible person’, to whose way of thinking Kant appeals with his example of the talers, is often deluded into taking collectively acknowledged notions for objective reality, and the objective reality revealed by scientific research for subjective fiction existing only in the heads of ‘theoreticians’. It is the ‘sensible person’, daily observing the sun rising in the East and setting in the West, who protested that the system of Copernicus was a blasphemous invention that was contradicted by ‘obvious facts’. And in exactly the same way the common person, drawn into the orbit of commodity-money relations, regards money as a perfectly material thing; and value, which in fact finds its external expression in money, as a mere abstraction existing only in the heads of theoreticians, only ‘ideally’.

For this reason, serious materialism, faced with these kinds of situations, could not define the ‘ideal’ as that which exists in the consciousness of the individual, and the ‘material’ as that which exists outside this consciousness, as the sensuously perceived form of the external thing, as a real corporeal form. The boundary between the two – between the ‘material’ and the ‘ideal’, between the ‘thing in itself’ and its representation in social consciousness – could not pass along this line because, if it were to do so, materialism would be completely helpless when confronted with the dialectics that Hegel had discovered in the relations between the ‘material’ and the ‘ideal’ (particularly in the phenomena of fetishism of all kinds, from religious to commodity fetishism, and, moreover, the fetishism of words, of language, symbols and signs).

It is a fact that like the icon or the gold coin, any word (term or combination of terms) is primarily a 'thing' that exists outside the consciousness of an individual, any individual, and possesses perfectly real corporeal properties and is sensuously perceived. According to the old classification accepted by everyone, including Kant, words clearly come under the category of the 'material' or the 'real' with just as much justification as stones or flowers, bread or a bottle of wine, the guillotine or the printing press. In contrast to these things, what we call the 'ideal' is their subjective image in the head of the individual, in the individual consciousness. No?

But here we are immediately confronted with the trickiness of this distinction, which is fully apparent in discussions on money in political economy (Kant, being poorly acquainted with political economy, did not suspect such tricks), and which is fully taken into account by the Hegelian School and its conception of the 'reification', 'alienation', 'objectification' of universal representations. As a result of this process, which occurs completely spontaneously, out of sight of the consciousness of the individual, that is to say, quite unintentionally, the individual is confronted by people's common (collectively acknowledged) representation in the form of an 'external thing', which has absolutely nothing in common with the sensuously perceived corporeal form in which it is represented.

For example, the name 'Peter' is, in its sensuously perceptible corporeal form, absolutely unlike the real Peter, the person it designates, or the sensuously represented image of Peter that other people have of him.<sup>20</sup> The relationship is the same between the gold coin and the goods that can be bought with it, goods (commodities) whose universal representation is the coin or (later) the banknote. The coin represents not itself but an 'other' in the very sense in which a diplomat represents not his own person but his country, which has authorised him to do so. The same may be said of the word, the verbal symbol or sign, or any combination of such signs and the syntactical pattern of this combination.

This relationship of representation (reflection, in the dialectical-materialist sense of the term) is a relationship in which one sensuously perceived thing, while remaining itself, performs the role or function of representing quite another thing (to be even more precise, it represents the universal nature of that other thing, that is, something 'other' which in sensuous, corporeal terms is quite unlike it), and in this way acquires a new plane of existence. In the Hegelian terminological tradition, this relationship acquired the title of 'ideality'.

Clearly, this is not an arbitrary semantic whim of Hegel and Hegelians, but instead constitutes a very important terminological designation of the actual

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20. There is no 'isomorphism', 'homorphism', or any other morphisms here. No point in looking, for they are not here.

situation, even if not fully understood by Hegel. 'Ideality', according to Hegel, only begins where the sensuously-perceived thing, while remaining itself, transforms into a representation of something 'other', where its 'being-for-itself is not being-for-itself'. Where this 'other' transforms it into a form of its own being (which is why he illustrates 'ideality' in the image of a push, 'contact', 'mediation', although the push is 'ideal' only at one point, at the point where it flows into another body). Behind the scholastics of Hegelian terminology lies a fundamentally important relation, which was fully understood only by Marx in the course of his analysis of commodity fetishism and the money-form of value, the money-form of the expression (namely representation) of value.

In *Capital*, Marx quite consciously uses the term 'ideal' in this formal meaning as given by Hegel, and not in the sense in which it was used by the whole pre-Hegelian tradition, including Kant – although the philosophical-theoretical interpretation of the range of phenomena, which in both cases is similarly designated 'ideal', is diametrically opposed to its Hegelian interpretation. The meaning of the term 'ideal' in Marx and Hegel is the same, but the concepts (that is, the ways of understanding this 'same' meaning) are profoundly different. After all, the word 'concept' in dialectically interpreted logic is a synonym for 'understanding the essence of the matter', the essence of phenomena which are only denoted by a given term; it is by no means a synonym for the 'meaning of the term', which may be formally interpreted as the sum-total of 'attributes' of the phenomena to which the term is applied.

It was for this reason that Marx, like any genuine theoretician, preferred not to change the historically formed 'meanings of terms', the established nomenclature of phenomena, but rather while making strict and rigorous use of these, proposed a quite different understanding of these phenomena that was actually in opposition to the traditional understanding. In contrast to 'theorists' who accept and pass off as scientific discoveries purely terminological reworkings of old truths, and invent new terms, do not advance by one iota the current understanding, 'concept' or 'definition of the concept'.<sup>21</sup>

In *Capital*, when analysing money – that familiar and yet mysterious category of social phenomena – Marx formulates the following definition: 'Der Preis oder die Geldform der Waren ist, wie ihre Wertform überhaupt, eine von ihrer handgreiflich reellen Körperform unterschiedene also nur ideelle oder vorgestellte Form'.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Note that neopositivists, by fundamentally equating the definition of the concept with the definition of the term, thus in their own way resolve the problem of the 'ideal', essentially denying this important category of its scientific meaning, and attributing the opposition of the 'ideal' and the 'material' to the category of 'metaphysical', that is, in their terminology, to pre-scientific and anti-scientific distinctions.

22. Marx 1969, p. 110 [English translation: Marx 1996b, p. 103 – A.L.].

The 'ideal' described here is nothing more or less than the value-form of the products of labour in general ('die Wertform überhaupt').

Consequently, the reader for whom the term 'ideal' is a synonym for that which is 'immanent in consciousness', 'existing only in consciousness', 'only in people's representations', only in their 'imagination', will simply misread the thought being expressed and will acquire a false understanding of Marx, one that has nothing in common with his actual understanding. Indeed, in this case the text will be read in such a way that capital – which is nothing other than the value-form of the organisation and development of productive forces, a form of the functioning of the means of production – also exists (following Marx!) only in consciousness, only in people's subjective imagination, and 'not in reality'.

Obviously, only someone like Chase, but in no way Karl Marx, could understand the issue this way, that is to say, only a follower of Berkeley, and certainly not a materialist.

According to Marx, of course, the ideality of the value-form consists not in the fact that this form represents a mental phenomenon existing only in the brain of the commodity-owner or theoretician, but in the fact that in this case, as in many others, the corporeally palpable form of the thing (for example, a coat) is only a form of expression of quite a different 'thing' (linen, as a value) with which it has nothing in common. The value of the linen is represented, expressed, 'embodied' in the form of a coat, and the form of the coat is the 'ideal or represented form' of the value of the linen.

As a use value, the linen is something palpably different from the coat; as value, it is the same as the coat, and now has the appearance of a coat. Thus the linen acquires a value form different from its physical form. The fact that it is value, is made manifest by its equality with the coat, just as the sheep's nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God.<sup>23</sup>

This is a completely objective relationship (as it is entirely independent of the commodity-owner's consciousness and will, established outside his consciousness), within which the natural form of commodity B becomes the value-form of commodity A, or the body of commodity B acts as a mirror to the value of commodity A, the authorised representative of its 'value' nature, of the 'substance' which is 'embodied' both here and there.

For this reason, and no other, the value-form is ideal, that is to say, it is something quite different from the palpable-corporeal form of the thing in which it is presented, 'represented', expressed, 'embodied', 'alienated'.

What is this 'other' that is expressed or represented here? People's consciousness or will? By no means. On the contrary, people's will and consciousness are

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23. Marx 1996b, p. 62.



both determined by this objective ideal form, and the thing that is expressed in it, 'represented' by it, is a definite social relationship between people which in their eyes assumes the fantastic form of a relationship between things.

In other words, what is 'represented' here as a thing, is a form of human activity, a form of life-activity that they perform together, developing quite spontaneously, 'out of the sight of consciousness', and materially established in the form of the relationship between things, as described above. Through and only through such means is the ideality of such a 'thing', its 'sensuous-suprasensuous character', created.

Here the ideal form actually confronts individual consciousness and individual will as the form of the external thing (recall Kant's *talers*), and is necessarily perceived precisely as the form of the external thing, not its palpable-corporeal form, but as the form of another equally palpable-corporeal thing that it represents, expresses, embodies, differing, however, from the palpable corporeality of both things and having nothing in common with their sensuously perceptible physical nature. What is embodied and 'represented' here is a definite form of labour, a definite form of human objective activity, that is to say, the transformation [преобразования] of nature by social man.

It is here that we find the answer to the riddle of 'ideality'. Ideality, according to Marx, is nothing but the form of social-human activity represented in the thing, reflecting objective reality. Or, conversely, the form of human activity, which reflects objective reality, represented as a thing, as an object.

'Ideality' is a kind of stamp impressed on the substance of nature by social-human life-activity, a form of the functioning of the physical thing in the process of social-human life-activity. So all the things involved in the social process acquire a new 'form of existence' that is not included in their physical nature and differs from it completely – their ideal form.

So, there can be no talk of 'ideality' where there are no people socially producing and reproducing their material life, that is to say, individuals collectively performing labour and, therefore, necessarily possessing consciousness and will. But this does not mean that the 'ideality of things' is a product of their conscious will, that it is 'immanent in consciousness' and exists only in consciousness. Quite the reverse, the individual's consciousness and will act as functions of the ideality of things, as the realisation of the ideality of things.

Ideality, thus, has a purely social nature and origin, and yet the ideal, in the form of knowledge, reflects objective reality, which exists independently of humanity. It is the form of a thing, but it is outside this thing, namely in the activity of man, as a form of this activity. Or conversely, it is the form of a person's activity but outside this person, as a form of the thing. Here, then, is the key to the whole mystery, the whole mystique, which forms the real basis for all kinds of idealistic constructions and conceptions both of man and of the world

beyond man, from Plato to Carnap and Popper. 'Ideality' constantly slips away from the metaphysically single-valued theoretical establishment. As soon as it is established as the 'form of the thing' it begins to tease the theoretician with its 'immateriality', its 'functional' character, and appears only as a form of 'pure activity', only as *actus purus*. On the other hand, as soon as one attempts to establish it 'as such', as purified of all the traces of palpable corporeality, this attempt is fundamentally doomed to failure, and after such purification there will be nothing but transparent emptiness, an indefinable vacuum.

And indeed, as Hegel understood so well, it is absurd to speak of 'activity' that is not realised in anything definite, not 'embodied', not realised in something corporeal, if only in words, speech or language. If such 'activity' exists, it cannot be in reality but only in possibility, only potentially, and, therefore, not as activity but as its opposite, as inactivity, as the absence of activity.

So, according to Hegel, 'spirit', as something ideal, as something opposed to the world of corporeally established forms, cannot 'reflect' at all (that is to say, it cannot become aware of the forms of its own structure) unless it preliminarily opposes 'itself to itself', as an 'object' that differs from itself, as a 'thing'. This is impossible for absolute spirit, much like the desire of a beautiful woman to admire herself in the absence of a mirror in which she can see herself as something 'other', as an image existing outside herself. The eye cannot see itself; it sees only what is other, even if this other is another eye, its own reflection in the mirror.

When speaking of the value-form as the ideal form of a thing, Marx by no means accidentally invokes the image of the mirror:

In a sort of way, it is with man as with commodities. Since he comes into the world neither with a looking glass in his hand, nor as a Fichtean philosopher, to whom 'I am I' is sufficient, man first sees and recognises himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind. And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his Pauline personality, becomes to Peter the type of the genus homo.<sup>24</sup>

Here Marx himself unequivocally draws a parallel between his theory of the 'ideality' of the value-form and Hegel's understanding of 'ideality', which takes into account the dialectics of the emergence of the collective self-consciousness of the human race. Yes, Hegel understood the situation with greater breadth and depth than the 'Fichtean philosopher'; he established the fact that before it is able to examine itself, 'spirit' must shed its purity, unblemished by 'tangible matter', and its transparent nature, and must turn itself into an object and in the form of this object oppose itself to itself. At first in the form of the word, in the form of verbal

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24. Marx 1996b [1867], p. 103.

'embodiment', and then in the form of instruments of labour, statues, machines, guns, churches, factories, constitutions and states, in the form of the grandiose 'inorganic body of man', in the form of the sensuously perceptible body of civilisation which for him serves only as a mirror in which he can examine himself, his 'other being', and know through this examination his own 'pure ideality', understanding himself as 'pure activity'. Hegel fully realised that ideality as 'pure activity' is not directly given and cannot be given 'as such', immediately, in all its purity and undisturbed perfection; it can be known only through an analysis of its 'incarnations', through its reflection in the mirror of palpable reality, in the mirror of the system of things (their forms and relations) created by the activity of 'pure spirit'. By their fruits ye shall know them – and not otherwise.

The ideal forms of the world are, according to Hegel, forms of 'pure' activity realised in some material. If they are not realised in some palpable-corporeal material, they remain invisible and unknown for the active spirit itself, and the spirit cannot become aware of them. In order to be examined they must be 'reified', that is, turned into the forms and relations of things. Only in this case does ideality exist and possess determinate being; only as a reified and reifiable form of activity, a form of activity that has become and is becoming the form of an object, a palpable-corporeal thing outside consciousness, and in no case as a transcendental-mental pattern of consciousness, or the internal pattern of the 'self', distinguishing itself from itself within itself, as it turned out with the 'Fichtean philosopher'.

As the internal pattern of the activity of consciousness, as a pattern 'immanent in consciousness', ideality can have only an illusory, phantasmal existence. It becomes real only in the course of its reification, objectification (and de-objectification), alienation and dis-alienation. Clearly, this is a much more reasonable and realistic interpretation, compared to that of Kant and Fichte. It embraces the actual dialectics of people's developing 'self-consciousness' and embraces the actual phases and metamorphoses in whose succession alone the 'ideality' of the world exists.

For this reason Marx joins Hegel as regards terminology, rather than Kant or Fichte, since the latter philosophers tried to solve the problem of 'ideality' (activity) while remaining 'inside consciousness', without venturing into the external sensuously perceptible corporeal world, the world of the palpable corporeal forms and relations of things.

This Hegelian definition of the term 'ideality' takes in the whole range of phenomena within which the 'ideal' (understood as the corporeally embodied form of the activity of social man) really exists – as activity in the form of the thing, or conversely, as the thing in the form of activity, as a 'moment' of this activity, as its fleeting metamorphoses.

Without an understanding of this state of affairs it would be totally impossible to fathom the miracles performed by the commodity before people's eyes, the commodity-form of the product, particularly in its dazzling money-form, in the form of the notorious 'real talers', 'real roubles', or 'real dollars', things which, as soon as we have the slightest theoretical understanding of them, immediately turn out to be not 'real' at all, but 'ideal' through and through, things whose category quite unambiguously includes words, the units of language, and many other 'things'. Things that, while being wholly 'material', palpable-corporeal formations, acquire all their 'meaning' (function and role) from 'spirit', from 'thought', and even owe their specific corporeal existence to spirit. Outside and without spirit there cannot even be words; there is merely a vibration of the air.

The mystery of this category of 'things', the secret of their 'ideality', their 'sensuous-suprasensuous character', was first revealed by Marx in the course of his analysis of commodity fetishism, in the course of his analysis of the commodity (value) form of the product, as the typical and fundamental form of this type, as the 'purely ideal form'.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself. But, in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, Marx characterises the commodity form as an ideal form, that is to say, as a form that has absolutely nothing in common with the real, corporeally palpable form of that body, in which it is represented (that is, reflected, expressed, reified, objectified, alienated, realised) and by means of which it 'exists', possesses 'being'.

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25. Marx 1996b [1867], p. 82.

It is 'ideal' because it does not include a single atom of the substance of the body in which it is represented, because it is the form of quite another body. And this other body is present here not corporeally-substantially (it is found to be 'corporeal' at quite a different point in space), but again only 'ideally', and there is not a single atom of its substance. Chemical analysis of a gold coin will not reveal a single molecule of boot-polish, and vice versa. Nevertheless, a gold coin represents (expresses) the value of a hundred tins of boot-polish precisely by its weight and lustre.

And, of course, this act of representation is by no means performed in the consciousness of the seller of boot-polish, but outside his consciousness in any 'sense' of this word, outside his head, in the space of the market, and without his having even the slightest suspicion of the mysterious nature of the money-form and the essence of the price of boot-polish. Anyone can spend money without knowing what money is.

For this very reason the person who confidently uses his native language to express the most subtle and complex circumstances of life would find himself in a very difficult position if he were to take it into his head to acquire consciousness of the relationship between the 'sign' and the 'meaning'. The consciousness which he may gather from linguistic studies in the present state of the science of linguistics is more likely to place him in the position of the centipede that was unwise enough to ask itself which leg to use. Thank god such things remain 'outside consciousness'. And the whole difficulty which has caused so much bother to philosophy as well lies in the fact that 'ideal forms', like the value-form, the form of thought or syntactical form, have always arisen, taken shape and developed, turned into something wholly objective, completely independent of anyone's consciousness, in the course of processes that occur not at all in the head, but always outside it – although not without its participation.

If it were otherwise, the idealism of Plato and Hegel would, indeed, be a most strange delusion, some nonsense quite unworthy of minds of such calibre and influence. The objectivity of the 'ideal form' is no fantasy of Plato's or Hegel's, but an entirely indisputable, obvious and well-known stubborn fact: a fact over which thinkers of such calibre as Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Einstein, not to mention thousands of lower-rank thinkers, have racked their brains for millennia.

'Idealism' is not a consequence of some elementary error committed by a naïve school-kid who imagined a terrible ghost that was not there. Idealism is a speculative interpretation of the objectivity of the ideal form, that is to say, of the fact of its existence in the space of human culture, independently of the will and consciousness of individuals.

In the given case, materialism can consist only in the scientific explanation of this fact and not in ignoring it. Formally, this fact appears [just as thinkers of

the 'Platonic line' depicted it – E.I.] as an objective form of movement of physical corporeal bodies, despite its obvious incorporeality. An incorporeal form, controlling the fate of entirely corporeal forms, determining if they are to be or not to be. A form, like some immaterial [бесплотная] yet all-powerful 'soul' of things. A form that preserves itself in the most diverse corporeal incarnations and does not coincide with any of them. A form of which it cannot be said where exactly it 'exists'. Everywhere and nowhere in particular. And in any case, not in the head of Ivan Ivanovich or Peter Petrovich, although it exists there too.

A completely rational understanding of the 'ideal' form in general – purified of all mysticism, as the 'ideal form' of the real, substantially material world – was achieved by K. Marx precisely in the course of his constructive-critical overcoming of the Hegelian conception of ideality, appearing in specific form as the solution to the question of the value-form through a critique of political economy, namely the classical labour theory of value. The ideality of the value-form is a typical and characteristic case of ideality in general; hence, Marx's concept of the value-form concretely demonstrates all the advantages of the dialectical-materialist view of ideality and of the 'ideal'.

The value-form is understood in *Capital* precisely as the reified (represented as a thing, a relationship between things) form of socio-human life-activity. Directly it appears before us as a corporeal, physically palpable 'incarnation' of something 'other', and this 'other' cannot be some other physically-palpable 'body', another 'thing', or 'matter', or substance understood as matter, as a certain physically palpable matter.

It appears the only alternative is to assume some kind of an incorporeal substance, some kind of 'immaterial thing', and classical philosophy proposed a logical enough solution: this strange 'substance' could only be activity – 'pure activity', 'purely form-creating activity', '*actus purus*'. But in the sphere of economic activity this substance was obviously deciphered as labour, as physical human labour, transforming the physical body of nature, and 'value' as realised labour, as the 'embodied' act of labour.

So it was precisely in political economy that scientific thought made its first decisive step towards solving the riddle of the essence of 'ideality'. Already Smith and Ricardo – men fairly far removed from philosophy – clearly perceived the 'substance' of the mysterious value definitions in labour.

Although understood from the standpoint of 'substance', value remained a mystery as regards its 'form'; thus, the classical labour theory of value was unable to explain why this substance expressed itself as it did, and not in some other way. Incidentally, the classical bourgeois tradition was not particularly interested in this question, and Marx clearly demonstrated the reason for its indifference toward this subject. In any event, 'deduction', that is, the theoretical inference of the value-form from its 'substance', remained an impossible task for bourgeois

science. Consequently, the ideality of this form remained as mysterious and mystical as before.

Insofar as theorists found themselves in direct confrontation with the mysterious – physically impalpable – properties of this form, again and again they returned to the well-known ways of interpreting ‘ideality’. Hence, the idea of the existence of ‘ideal atoms of value’, which were highly reminiscent of Leibniz’s monads, the immaterial and unextended quanta of ‘intellectual substance’.

Marx, as an economist, was assisted by the fact that he was not as naïve about philosophy as Smith and Ricardo.

Having noted in the Fichtean-Hegelian conception of ideality, as ‘pure ideality’ – an abstractly mystifying description of the real, physically palpable labour of social man, the process of the physical transformation of physical nature, accomplished by the physical body of man – he gained the theoretical key to the solution to the riddle of the ideality of the value-form.

The value of a thing presented itself as the reified labour of man and, therefore, the value-form turned out to be nothing other than the reified form of that labour, a form of human life-activity, appearing to man in the form of a thing.

And the fact that this is by no means the form of a thing by itself (that is, the thing in its natural determination), but is instead a form of socio-human labour or the form-creating activity of social man embodied in the material of nature – this fact contained the solution to the riddle of ‘ideality’. An entirely rational, factual solution – a materialist interpretation of all the mystical-mysterious determinations of the value-form as the ideal form.

Precisely the understanding of the ‘value-form in general’ as a ‘purely ideal form’ gave K. Marx the possibility, for the first time in the history of political economy, to distinguish with confidence material forms of relations between people – as relations that bind them in the process of producing their material life, which are entirely independent of their conscious intentions (of their will and consciousness) – from the ideal expression of these relations in forms of their conscious, purposeful will, that is to say, in the form of their stable ideal formations, which Marx called ‘objective forms of thought’.<sup>26</sup>

It was this very same distinction as the distinction between material and ideological relations, on which V.I. Lenin later insisted. In the latter category he included, as is well-known, legal, political and state-political relations between people, materialised in the form of corresponding institutions – in the form of the organs of state power, the structures of political parties and other social organisations, and earlier, in the form of the Church with its strict hierarchy, in the form of systems of customs and rituals, and so on.

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26. [Here the Daglish translation substantially veers from the original text – A.L.]

All these relations and their corresponding institutions, as the ideal forms of the expression of material (economic) relations, exist, of course, not inside the head, not inside the brain, but in that same real space of human life-activity as material, economic relations of production.

This is precisely why they are so often confused with each other, seeing economic relations where there are only legal forms of their regulation (and vice versa); and confused just as unceremoniously as economists before Marx had confused 'value' with 'price', that is, a material economic fact with its ideal expression in the material of money.

They took a 'purely ideal form' of the expression of a material fact, without hesitation, for the actual material, economic fact, for 'value as such', for 'value in general'. Though they had no doubt that 'value as such', independent of its ideal expression in price, is but a 'fiction', invented by classics of the labour theory of value and existed only in the heads of Smith, Ricardo and Marx.

On this rested, and continues to rest until now, the whole vulgar political-economy, starting with Bailey and J.S. Mill and ending with J.M. Keynes: in place of an analysis of the real material, economic relations and their immanent forms, there is groping in the sphere of purely ideal forms of these relations, objectively presented in such self-evident 'things' as money, bonds, stocks, investments, in other words, in established laws and the *conscious* social relations between agents of capitalist production and the circulation they permit. From here automatically develops a perspective on economic relations as purely mental relations, that is, in their terms, 'ideal'.

Thus, for J.M. Keynes, 'value' is a myth, an empty word. In reality, allegedly, there 'exists' only market price. Consequently, the 'rate of interest' and all similar categories are but 'predominantly mental categories', and the crisis of overproduction 'is the mere consequence of upsetting the delicate balance of spontaneous optimism. In estimating the prospects of investment, we must have regard, therefore, to the nerves and hysteria and even the digestions and reactions to the weather of those upon whose spontaneous activity it largely depends'.<sup>27</sup>

Here is a consequence of a metaphysical understanding of the relationship between the 'material' and the 'ideal'.

This leads to one conclusion: metaphysical materialism, with its naïve understanding of the 'ideal' and the 'material', when confronted with a concretely scientific (in this case, political-economic) problem, demanding a properly philosophical (dialectical) distinction between one and the other, unwittingly transforms into the purest subjective idealism in the Berkelian-Machian sense – the inevitable and just punishment for a metaphysical materialist, disregarding

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27. Keynes 2006 [1936], p. 145.



dialectics. Fighting against dialectics as 'Hegelianism', he inevitably falls into idealism, infinitely inferior and more banal than Hegelian.

Exactly the same thing happens when he confronts the so-called problem of 'ideal, or abstract, objects' in mathematical knowledge.

In mathematics in general, but especially in essays on its epistemological rationale, the expression 'ideal object' has for some time now been given widespread usage. Naturally, the following question arises: How legitimate, in this case, is this expression from the perspective of materialist philosophy, from the perspective of the theory of reflection? What is being called here the 'ideal', what in general is being meant by this word?

Obviously, this concept embraces all [significant – E.I.] objects of mathematical thought [topological structures, imaginary numbers like the square root of minus one, regularities discovered in natural numbers, and so on and so forth. In short, all that current mathematicians study – E.I.]

This fact serves as the basis for a widely known assertion – according not only to mathematics, but all contemporary science, unlike the natural sciences of previous epochs – that it examines specifically (and only) the ideal (the world of 'ideal objects'), that the ideal is its only specific object.

Representatives of neopositivism, it goes without saying, did not miss the opportunity to discern in this fact an extra argument against materialism, against the thesis that mathematics, like any science, nevertheless investigates the real material world, even though it examines the world from its own special perspective, from its own specifically mathematical point of view.

It must be acknowledged that non-dialectical, spontaneous [стихийный] materialism clearly proves to be unfounded, and finds itself in a difficult position, in a no-win situation. And the fault lies with its naïve interpretation of 'ideality', the category of the ideal.

In fact, if you understand the 'ideal' as that (and only that) which exists in consciousness, in the human head, namely some purely mental or psychophysiological mental phenomenon, then you have already found yourself to be helpless before a subjective-idealist understanding of the object of contemporary mathematical knowledge, forced to capitulate before the combined force of neopositivism, Husserlism and similar doctrines. For the syllogism here turns out to be fatal: if it is true that contemporary mathematics studies 'ideal objects', and 'ideal objects', by your own account, exist in consciousness and nowhere else, then it automatically follows that contemporary mathematics examines only events that occur in consciousness and only in consciousness, only in the human head, and in no way in the real, existing world outside consciousness and outside the head.

Of course, you can always make a feint that mathematicians, in considering 'ideal objects', in fact, unbeknownst to themselves, 'have in mind' something

completely other than philosophy, namely the 'material', objective world of natural and socio-historical phenomena, only expressed, consequently, inaccurately.

But this, of course, is only a feint, and in actual fact you would only further entangle yourself in difficulties. This question is not resolved so easily, and you would have to explain to mathematicians what 'in actual fact' is hidden behind this designation.

If you answer that, say, a 'topological structure' is in fact a completely material object, and not an ideal one, as they are accustomed to thinking, then you risk causing confusion for anyone skilled in mathematics. It will be explained that a topological structure (as if it were the only one!) is still a mathematical image, and not the actual material reality, and, furthermore, that a philosopher (if anyone) should have a more acute understanding of the differences between a material object and a mathematical construction.

And the mathematician will be entirely correct on this point, as he knows well that it is useless to look for a 'topological structure' in the world of sensuously perceptible phenomena. For he understands quite well that to declare the topological structure to be exclusively a *mental* phenomenon (as subjective idealism tends to do, in part the 'methodological solipsism' of Rudolph Carnap and his followers) means to commit at best an unforgivable sin, to deny mathematical science, and in the end the whole of mathematical natural science [естествознанию], of the objective and necessary meaning of its constructions.

Karl Popper would then say that the world of 'ideal objects' in contemporary science is not the 'physical world' or the 'mental world', but clearly some 'third world', existing in some mysterious manner alongside and distinct from both. It differs from the world of *physical* phenomena – observed by means of synchrotrons, oscilloscopes and other ingenious devices – by its obvious 'incorporeality' and 'intelligibility' (that is to say, by its purely intelligible character), and from the world of *mental* phenomena by its equally obvious organisation and independence from the individual mind and from a collective of such minds, that is, by its very peculiar objectivity and necessity.

To a representative of contemporary mathematical science this explanation would certainly appear far more convincing and satisfying than the explanation arising from the position of the homegrown, spontaneous and non-dialectical materialism. It is no coincidence that Popper is quite popular in the academic world.

For non-dialectical and pre-dialectical materialism, the situation is genuinely hopeless and treacherous.

The only philosophical position that can defend the honour of materialism in this situation consists of decisively rejecting the old, metaphysical understanding of 'ideality', and of decisively accepting the dialectical-materialist interpretation, which was developed by Karl Marx. The first step on the path to a

critical materialist transformation of the Hegelian dialectic, proceeds from the acceptance of the 'ideality' of the phenomena of the external world themselves, the world that is outside of and prior to man with his head, and then, more concretely, in the course of the positive solution to the problem of the '*value-form*' and its fundamental difference *from value in itself* – this most-typical case of the opposition between a 'purely ideal form' and its own *material* image.

This is what is interesting, this is what is actual to this day about *Capital*, where this problem is solved brilliantly, dialectically, and entirely concretely – in general philosophical terms and in specifically economic terms, that is to say, in terms of the properly philosophical distinction between the 'ideal form' of the expression of a real economic fact, as well as its real, material fact.

When science, including mathematical natural science, completely understands the full depth and accuracy of the solution to the problem of the dialectical identity and difference between the 'ideal' and the 'material' achieved in *Capital*, then and only then will it stop believing Popper with his interpretation of the world of 'ideal objects' and 'ideal models' as 'third world', which confronts, as something special, the physical world and the mental world. Then Popper will be understood as a phenomenon, where we find entangled in this tricky problem: neopositivism, the *subjective* idealism of Russell and Carnap, degenerating into a belated type of archaic *objective* idealism, closely resembling traditional Platonism.

But this requires the dialectical-materialist solution to the problem of 'ideality', that is, an essentially materialist solution, but one enriched by the lessons of Hegelian dialectics, which Popper, like all neopositivists, prefers to dismiss, without comprehending the simple historical circumstance that Hegel's dialectic is much closer to the contemporary scientific view of things than that of Plato...<sup>28</sup>

The ideal form of a thing is a form of social-human life-activity, which exists not in that life-activity, but as a form of the external thing, which represents and reflects another thing. Conversely, it is a form of a thing, but is outside of this thing, namely as a form of human life-activity, in man, 'inside man'.

And since in its developed stages, human life-activity always has a purposeful, that is to say, consciously willed character, 'ideality' appears as a form of consciousness and will – as a law directing human consciousness and will, as an objectively compulsory pattern of consciously willed activity. This is why it is so easy to picture the 'ideal' exclusively as a form of consciousness and self-consciousness, exclusively as a 'transcendental' pattern of the mind and the will that realises this pattern.

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28. [Daglish translation begins again roughly here – A.L.]

And if this is so, then the Platonic-Hegelian conception of 'ideality' begins to appear as merely an inadmissible projection of forms of consciousness and will (forms of thought) onto the 'external world', and the 'critique' of Hegel is reduced to reproaches for his having 'ontologised', 'hypostatized' (in other words, interpreting as facts of the existing world outside individual consciousness) purely subjective forms of human mental activity. This leads to the entirely logical conclusion that all categories of thought ('quantity', 'measure', 'necessity', 'essence', and so on) are only 'ideal', that is to say, only transcendental-psychological patterns of the subject's activity and nothing else.

Marx, of course, had quite a different conception whereby all logical categories without exception are only the idealised (that is, reflected, transformed into forms of human life-activity, which are primarily external, sensuously-objective, and also 'mental') universal forms of existence of objective reality, of the external world, which exist independently of man and humanity.

In no way are they projections of forms of the mental world onto the 'physical' world. A conception, as can easily be seen, that is just the reverse in sequence from its 'theoretical deduction'.

In Marx, this understanding of 'ideality' is based primarily on the materialist understanding of the specific nature of the social – human – relationship to the world (and its fundamental difference from the animal's relationship to the world, from a purely biological relationship):

'The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness'.<sup>29</sup>

This means that the animal's activity is directed only towards external objects. The activity of man, on the other hand, is directed not only towards external objects, but also towards his own forms of life-activity. It is activity directed upon itself – what German classical philosophy presented as the specific feature of the 'spirit', as 'reflection', as 'self-consciousness'.

In the above passage quoted from Marx (precisely because it is taken from his early works), he does not sufficiently emphasise the fundamentally important detail that distinguishes his position from the Fichtean-Hegelian interpretation of 'reflection' (the relationship to oneself as to the 'other'). In light of this, the cited passage may be understood to mean that man acquires a new, second plane of life-activity because he (unlike the animal) possesses consciousness and will.

However, just the opposite is the case: consciousness and will appear in man only because he already possesses a special plane of life-activity that is absent in the animal world – activity directed toward mastering specifically social, purely

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29. Marx 1975b [1844], p. 277.

social in origin and essence, forms of life-activity, which are therefore not biologically encoded in him.

The animal that has just been born is confronted with the external world. The forms of its life-activity are inborn along with the morphology of its body and it does not have to perform any special activity in order to 'internalise' them. It needs only to exercise the forms of behaviour encoded in it. Development consists only in the development of instincts, innate reactions to things and situations. The environment merely corrects this development.

Man is quite a different matter. The child that has just been born is confronted – outside itself – not only by the external world, but also by a very complex system of culture, which requires of him 'modes of behaviour' which are not genetically (morphologically) 'encoded' in his body, and do not appear in any way. Here it is not so much a matter of adjusting ready-made patterns of behaviour, but rather one of assimilating modes of life-activity that do not bear any relationship at all to the biologically necessary forms of the reactions of his organism to things and situations.

This applies even to the 'behavioural acts' directly connected with the satisfaction of biologically inborn needs: the need for food is biologically encoded in man, but the need to eat it with the help of a plate and spoon, knife and fork, sitting on a chair, at a table, and so on, is no more innate than the syntactical forms of the language he learns to speak. In relation to the morphology of the human body, these are purely external conditions, just like the rules of chess.<sup>30</sup>

These are purely forms of the external (existing outside the individual body) world, forms of the organisation of this world, which he has yet to convert into the forms of his individual life-activity, into the patterns and modes of his activity, in order to become human.

This is the world of the forms of social-human life-activity that confronts the newborn child (specifically, the biological organism of the species *homo sapiens*) as the objectivity to which he is compelled to adapt all his 'behaviour', all the functions of his organic body, as that object towards assimilation of which adults guide all his activity.

The presence of this specifically human object – the world of things created by man for man, and, therefore, things whose forms are reified forms of human activity (labour), and certainly not the forms naturally inherent in them – is the condition for the existence of consciousness and will. And certainly not the reverse: it is not consciousness and will that are the condition and prerequisite for the existence of this unique object, let alone its 'cause'.

[The consciousness and will that arise in the mind of the human individual are the direct consequence of the fact that he is confronted not by nature as

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30. Leontyev 1972; Meshcheryakov 1974.

such, but nature that has been transformed by the labour of previous generations, shaped by human labour, nature in the forms of human life-activity (as an object of his life-activity) – E.I.]

Consciousness and will become necessary forms of mental activity only where the individual is compelled to control his own organic body in answer not to the organic (natural) demands of this body but to demands presented from outside, by the 'rules' accepted by the society in which he was born. Only in these conditions is the individual compelled to distinguish himself from his own organic body. These rules are not passed on to him by birth, through his 'genes', but are imposed upon him from outside, dictated by culture and not by nature.

Only here appears the relationship to oneself as to a single representative of an 'other', a relationship unknown to animals. The human individual is compelled to subordinate his own actions to certain 'rules' and 'patterns' which he has to assimilate as a special object in order to make them rules and patterns of the life-activity of his own body.

At first they confront him precisely as an external object, as the forms and relationships between things produced and reproduced by human labour.

By mastering the objects of nature in the forms produced and reproduced by human labour, the individual becomes for the first time human, becomes a representative of the 'human race', whereas before this time he was merely a representative of a biological species.

The existence of this purely social inheritance of forms of life-activity, that is to say, a legacy of forms that is in no way transmitted through the genes, through the morphology of the organic body, but only through education, only through assimilation of the available culture, only through a process in the course of which the individual's organic body transforms into a representative of the human race (namely the whole specific aggregate of people connected by the ties of social relationships) – it is only the existence of this specific relationship that brings about consciousness and will as specifically human forms of mental activity.

Consciousness only arises where the individual is compelled to look at himself as if from the side, as if with the eyes of another person, the eyes of all other people – only where he is compelled to correlate his individual actions with the actions of another person, that is to say, only within the framework of collectively performed life-activity. It is only here that there is any need for will, in the sense of the ability to forcibly subordinate one's own inclinations and urges to a certain law, a certain demand dictated not at all by the individual organics of one's own body, but by the organisation of the 'collective body', the collective, that has formed around a certain common task.<sup>31</sup>

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31. Leontyev 1975.

Here and only here there arises the ideal plane of life-activity unknown to the animal. Consciousness and will are not the 'cause' of the manifestation of this new plane of relationships between the individual and the external world, but only the mental forms of its expression, in other words, its effect. Moreover, it is not an accidental but rather a necessary form of its manifestation, its expression, its realisation.

We shall go no further in examining consciousness and will (and their relationship to 'ideality') because here we begin to enter the special field of psychology. The problem of 'ideality' in its general form is equally significant for psychology, linguistics and any socio-historical discipline, and naturally goes beyond the bounds of psychology as such and must be regarded independently of purely psychological (or purely political-economic) details.

Psychology must necessarily proceed from the fact that between individual consciousness and objective reality there exists the 'mediating link' of the historically formed culture, which acts as the prerequisite and condition of individual mental activity. This comprises the economic and legal forms of human relationships, the forms of everyday life and language, and so on. For the individual's mental activity (consciousness and will of the individual) this culture appears immediately as a 'system of meanings', which have been 'reified' and confront him quite objectively as a 'non-psychological', extra-psychological reality.

The fundamental meaning of this fact is specifically underscored by A.N. Leontyev:

Thus, meaning refracts the world in the consciousness of man. Although language is the bearer of meanings, it is not their demiurge. Behind linguistic meanings hide socially produced methods (operations) of activity, in the course of which people alter and cognise objective reality. In other words, meanings represent the ideal form of the existence of the objective world, its properties, connections and relations, transformed and folded in the matter of language, which are disclosed in the aggregate of social practice. This is why meanings themselves, that is to say, abstracted from their functions in individual consciousness, are by no means 'mental', as is that socially cognised reality, which lies behind them.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, the transformation of the problem of 'ideality' into a psychological (or worse, into a psycho-physiological problem) leads materialist science straight toward a dead-end, since the secret of ideality is sought not where it actually arises, not in the space where the history of the real relationships between social man and nature is played out, but in the human skull, in the material relationships between neurons. And this approach is just as silly as the attempt

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32. Leontyev 1975, p. 134.

to discover the form of value by chemical analysis of the gold or banknotes in which this form presents itself to the eye and sense of touch. It is the same fetishism, the same attribution of properties to natural substance, which in fact do not belong to it as such, but are only forms of social human labour expressed in it, forms of social relations between people.

Indeed, fetishism is the most crude, the most primitive and savage form of idealism, conferring (in fantasy, of course) all attributes of 'spirit' to a log decorated with shells and feathers. This most crude form of idealism, which in no way differs from the behaviour of animals that attempt to lick and eat a light bulb, which serves for them (from the easy hand of the experimenter) as a signal that it is time to eat. For the animal, as for the fetishist, the light bulb and the log are in no way 'signals', not designations of 'something other', but the actual physical part of a physical situation, directly determining their behaviour. And so the Chinese mercilessly would beat a clay idol if it did not wish to send rain upon their fields.

The riddle and solution to the problem of 'idealism' is to be found in the peculiarity of a mentality that cannot distinguish between two fundamentally different and even opposed categories of phenomena of which it is sensuously aware as existing outside its brain: on the one hand, the natural properties of things, and on the other, those properties owing their existence not to nature but to social-human labour embodied and realised in these things.

This is the very point where such opposites as crudely naïve materialism and no less crudely naïve idealism directly merge. That is to say, where the material is directly identified with the ideal and vice versa, arising not from great minds on the scale of Plato or Hegel, but exactly from a lack of such minds, which thoughtlessly regard all that exists outside the head, outside mental activity, as 'material', and everything that is 'in the head', 'in consciousness', as 'ideal'.

This is precisely how Marx understands the essence of this confusion, which bourgeois political economy has not been able to resolve. In the draft notes to *Capital*, he writes:

The crude materialism of the economists who regard as the *natural properties* of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude as idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them.<sup>33</sup>

Real, scientific materialism, unlike crude materialism, lies not in declaring everything that is outside the brain of the individual to be 'primary', in describing this 'primary' as 'material', and declaring all that is 'in the head' to be 'secondary'

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33. Marx 1987 [1857–58], p. 76.



and 'ideal'. Scientific materialism lies in the ability to distinguish the fundamental borderline in the composition of sensuously palpable, sensuously perceptible 'things' and 'phenomena' themselves, to see the difference and opposition between the 'material' and the 'ideal' there and not somewhere else.

This materialism compels one to understand this distinction not as the commonly held one between 'real and imaginary talers' (dollars, roubles or yen), but instead as a distinction lying far deeper, namely in the very nature of social-human life-activity, in its fundamental differences from the life-activity of some animal, as from the biological life-activity of one's own organism.

The 'ideal' plane of reality comprises exclusively that which is created by labour both in man himself and in the part of nature in which he lives and acts, which has been produced and reproduced by his own social-human and, therefore, purposeful transforming activity, daily and hourly, ever since man has existed.

Hence, one cannot speak of the existence of an 'ideal plane' among animals (or in an uncivilised, purely biologically developed 'human') without departing from the rigorously established philosophical meaning of the term. This is why there can be no talk of any 'ideal' among animals, despite the undeniable existence of mental activity, and even some glimmers of 'consciousness' (which are very difficult to deny among domesticated dogs). Man acquires the 'ideal' plane of life-activity only through internalising the historically developed forms of social life-activity, only together with the social plane of existence, only together with culture. 'Ideality' is nothing but an aspect of culture, one of its dimensions, determining factors, properties. In relation to mental activity it is just as much an objective component as mountains and trees, the moon and the stars, as the processes of metabolism in the organic body of an individual.

[This is why – and not because of the 'foolishness of idealists' – people (and not only philosophers) often confuse the 'ideal' with the 'material', taking one for the other. Philosophy, even of the Platonic-Hegelian kind, is the only path to the disentanglement of this naïve primitive-commonsensical confusion, even though the common person boasts more than anyone of the superiority of his 'sober mind' over the 'mystical constructions of Plato and Hegel' – E.I.]

Idealism is not the fruit of some thoughtlessness, but the legitimate and natural fruit of a world where 'things acquire human properties while people are reduced to the level of a material force',<sup>34</sup> where things are endowed with 'spirit' while human beings are utterly deprived of it. 'Commodity fetishism, and all shades of this phenomenon that arise at a particular stage of economic analysis, is an actually-existing product of a real historical metamorphosis',<sup>35</sup> as Mikhail Lifshits accurately formulates in his book on Marx. The objective reality of 'ideal

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34. Lifshits 1972, p. 130.

35. Lifshits 1972, p. 130.

forms' is no mere invention of insidious idealists, as it seems to pseudo-materialists who recognise, on one side, the 'external world' and on the other, only the 'conscious brain' (or 'consciousness as a property and function of the brain'). This pseudo-materialism, despite all its good intentions, has both feet firmly planted in the same mystical swamp of fetishism as its opponent – principled idealism. This is also fetishism, only not that of a log, a bronze idol or 'Logos', but a fetishism of nervous tissue, a fetishism of neurons, axons and DNA, which in fact possess as little of the 'ideal' as any rock lying on the street, and just as little of the 'value' of a diamond that has not yet been discovered, no matter how huge and heavy it might be.

However, the brain, worked over and reproduced by labour, *becomes an organ – moreover, the authorised representative of 'ideality', the ideal plane of life-activity – characteristic only of man, an entity that socially produces his own material life*. This is the essence of real scientific materialism that is capable of resolving the problem of the 'ideal'.

And when Marx defines the 'ideal' as 'the material when it has been transposed and translated inside the human head', he means precisely the human head, not the bodily organ of 'homo sapiens' growing out of the neck of the individual thanks to Mother Nature. Many 'materialists' often forget this difference.

Inside the human head – when understood naturalistically (namely as it is examined by a physician, an anatomist, a biologist, a physiologist of the higher nervous activity, a biochemist, and so on...) – there is no 'ideal', there never was and there never will be. What exist there are material 'mechanisms', which provide, with their complex dynamics, for the activity of man in general, including activity on the ideal plane, according to the 'ideal plane', which confronts the brain as a special object, which is, in one way or another, the reified form of social-human life-activity, as purpose (the inseparable component of this life-activity), as the human meaning of a thing.<sup>36</sup>

This is why 'materialists' – who push physiologists on silly adventures after the 'ideal' in the brain itself, in the bulk of the nerve fabric of the cerebral cortex, in the depth of 'cerebral microstructures' and similar things – in the end achieve only one thing: the complete discrediting of materialism as a principle of scientific thought. Since physiologists cannot find the 'ideal' in the skull, therefore, they do not seek it out. Since it is not there, [therefore, pseudo-materialists do far greater harm to scientific thought about humanity and about the 'ideal' than Plato and Hegel put together. The latter, with an intelligent reading, even provide some benefit, which silly 'materialism' is in no way capable of providing, that is

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36. [This paragraph does not appear in the Daglish translation – A.L.]

to say, those materialists who are not well-versed in philosophy, unschooled in dialectics, who nevertheless boast about their imaginary materialism – E.I.]

'Ideality' is, indeed, necessarily connected with consciousness and will, but not at all in the way that the old pre-Marxist materialism describes. It is not ideality that is an 'aspect' or 'form of manifestation' of the sphere of consciousness-will, but, on the contrary, the consciously-wilful character of human mentality is a form of manifestation, an 'aspect' or mental manifestation of the ideal (that is, socio-historically generated) plane of relationships between man and nature.

[Ideality is a characteristic of things, not as they are determined by nature but as they are determined by labour, the transforming and form-creating activity of social man, his purposeful, sensuously objective activity – E.I.]

The ideal form is the form of a thing created by social-human labour, reproducing forms of the objective material world, which exist independently of man. Or, conversely, the form of labour realised in the substance of nature, 'embodied' in it, 'alienated' in it, 'realised' in it and, therefore, presenting itself to man, the creator, as the form of a thing or as a special relationship between things, a relationship in which one thing realises, reflects another, in which man has placed these things, his labour, and which would never arise on its own.

This is why man contemplates the 'ideal' as being outside himself, outside his own eyes, outside his own head – as existing objective reality. It is only because of this that he frequently and easily confuses the 'ideal' with the 'material', assuming those forms and relations between things that he created himself, [forms that have been 'placed' in them socio-historically, as natural-innate properties, historically transient forms and relations, as eternal and unalterable forms and relations between things, as relations dictated by 'laws of nature' – E.I.]

Here [and not in people's 'foolishness' or ignorance – E.I.] lies the cause of all idealist Platonic-Hegelian illusions. This is why the philosophical-theoretical refutation of objective idealism (conceptions where the ideality of things precedes their material being and acts as their cause) was able to be achieved only in the form of the positive understanding of the actual (objective) role of the 'ideal' in the process of social-human labour transforming the material of nature (including his own 'organic body', his biologically innate morphology with its hands and brains).

In the process of labour, man, while remaining a natural being, transforms both external things and (in doing so) his own 'natural' body; he shapes natural matter (including the matter of his own nervous system and the brain, which is its centre), converting it into a 'means' and an 'organ' of his purposeful life-activity. This is why from the start he looks upon 'nature' (matter) as the material in which his aims are 'embodied', as the 'means' of their realisation. This is why he sees in nature primarily what is 'adequate' for this role, what plays or may play

the part of a means towards his ends, that is to say, what he has already drawn, in one way or another, into the process of his purposeful activity.

Thus, at first he directs his attention upon the stars exclusively as a natural clock, calendar and compass, as means and instruments of his life-activity, and observes their 'natural' properties and regularities only insofar as they are natural properties and regularities of the material in which his activity is being performed, and with which he must, therefore, reckon as completely objective (in no way dependent on his will and consciousness) components of his activity.

But for this very reason he takes the results of his transforming activity (the forms and relations of things given by himself) as the forms and relations of things as they are. This gives rise to fetishism of every kind and shade, one of the varieties of which was and still is philosophical idealism: the doctrine which regards the ideal forms of things (namely the forms of human activity embodied in things) as the eternal, without premises, primordial and 'absolute' forms of the universe, and takes into account all else only insofar as this 'all else', that is to say, all the actual diversity of the world, has already been drawn into the process of labour, already been made the means, instrument and material of the realisation of purposeful activity, already been refracted through the grandiose prism of 'ideal forms' (forms of human activity), is already premised (represented) in these forms, already shaped by them.

For this reason the 'ideal' exists only in man. Outside man and beyond him there can be nothing 'ideal'. Man, however, is to be understood not as one individual with a brain, but as a real ensemble of real people collectively realising their specifically human life-activity, as the 'ensemble of all social relations' arising between people around one common task, around the process of the social production of their life. The ideal exists 'inside' man thus understood, because 'inside' man thus understood are all the things that 'mediate' the individuals who are socially producing their life: words, books, statues, churches, social clubs, television towers, and (above all!) the instruments of labour, from the stone axe and the bone needle to the modern automated factory and computer technology. In these 'things' the ideal exists as the 'subjective', purposeful form-creating life-activity of social man, embodied in the material of nature. [And not inside the 'brain', as well-meaning but philosophically ignorant materialists believe – E.I.]

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man, as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such exists only in the constant transformation of these two forms of its 'external incarnation' and does not coincide with either of them taken separately. It exists only through the unceasing

process of the transformation of the form of activity into the form of a thing and back – the form of a thing into the form of activity (of social man, of course).

Try to identify the 'ideal' with any one of these two forms of its immediate existence – and it no longer exists. All you have left is the 'substantial', entirely material body and its bodily functioning. The 'form of activity' as such turns out to be corporeally encoded in the nervous system, in intricate neurodynamic stereotypes and 'cerebral mechanisms' by the pattern of the external action of the material human organism of the individual's body. And you will discover nothing 'ideal' in that body, no matter how hard you try. The form of the thing created by man, taken out of the process of social life-activity, out of the process of the metabolism between man and nature, also turns out to be simply the material form of the thing, the physical shape of an external body and nothing more. A word, taken out of the organism of human intercourse, turns out to be nothing more than an acoustic or optical fact. 'In itself' it is no more 'ideal' than the human brain.

And only in the reciprocal movement of the two opposing 'metamorphoses' – forms of activity and forms of things in their dialectically contradictory mutual transformations – does the ideal exist.

Therefore, it was only dialectical materialism that was able to solve the problem of the ideality of things.

Part Two

**Contexts**



# Ilyenkov in the Context of Soviet Philosophical Culture: An Interview with Sergey Mareev

Alex Levant and Vesa Oittinen

Sergey Nikolaevich Mareev (b. 1941) is Professor of Philosophy at the Modern University for the Humanities (*Sovremennaya Gumanitarnaya Akademiya*) in Moscow and a member of the board of the society 'Dialectics and Culture' that organises annual 'Ilyenkov Readings' (*Ilyenkovskie Chteniya*), which are well attended – with one to two hundred speakers from all parts of Russia. Sergey Mareev is one of the main figures in the Ilyenkovian heritage among present-day Russian philosophers, and he has written several books developing the themes of Ilyenkov's philosophy, such as *The Dialectics of the Logical and the Historical and Marx's Concrete Historicism*.<sup>1</sup> He has written many presentations of Ilyenkov as a thinker.<sup>2</sup> Mareev's other fields of interest include logics, theory of knowledge and the philosophy of science.

*Dear Sergey Nikolaevich, you see yourself as a student of Evald Ilyenkov. When did you two first meet? What was the situation in Soviet philosophy at that time, and what position did Ilyenkov assume within it?*

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1. Mareev 1984, *Dialektika logicheskogo i istoricheskogo i konkretnyi istorizm K. Marksa*, Moskva: Nauka.

2. To mention but two of them: 1997's *Vstrecha s filosofom E.V. Ilyenkovym*, Moskva: Erebus; and 2005's *Ilyenkov*, Rostov-na-Donu: Mart. The latter is published in a series containing popular biographies of Russian thinkers of the twentieth century.



SM: I first met Ilyenkov in 1972, when I worked in the sector of the works of Marx and Engels at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU, after graduating from the Faculty of Philosophy at Moscow State University (MSU) in 1969. At that time, I had given him my text on the dialectics of the logical and the historical in Marx's *Grundrisse*. He liked my work, and suggested I come work at the Institute of Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences, USSR, which I did with the assistance of the academic Bonifatii Mikhailovich Kedrov, who curated a group on dialectics at that time and spoke highly of Ilyenkov. His support was crucial because other 'generals of philosophy' viewed Ilyenkov either negatively or sceptically. This scepticism was likewise common among ordinary colleagues who expressed their relationship to Ilyenkov with the following formula: we read Ilyenkov for his past accomplishments, but he won't be memorialised.

Ilyenkov is credited with understanding Marxist dialectics not only as a *general theory of development*, but as *logic* and a *theory of knowledge*. In other words, he charted a direction of Marxist research into the field of epistemology and methodology. (Today, it is common to consider Pavel Vasilyevich Kopnin as the pioneer in this field; however, there are differences in their understandings of dialectics that I do not have the space to discuss here).

During the thaw, it elicited considerable enthusiasm. It was seen as – and in fact it was – an exit from the frame of dogmatic Stalinist Diamat. But after the removal of Khrushchev in 1964 (I had just enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy), and in particular after 1968, the mood drastically shifted. If previously the struggle with dogmatic, official Marxism was understood as a return to authentic Marxism, to the Marxism of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the *Grundrisse*, then this struggle was now treated as a shift to other, non-Marxist philosophical positions. And now those who stood together with Ilyenkov against dogmatism, ironised about his preoccupation with Spinoza and the problem of educating deaf-blind children, and who saw names like Popper, Kuhn and Lakatos as the edge of progress. In this way, Ilyenkov was transformed from a leader of the thaw into a philosophical outsider. Many of his former friends, students and associates began to turn away from him under the pretext that he had exhausted himself, but they wanted to go further.

*It seems that Ilyenkov produced his best work in the 1960s, that is to say, he was, in some ways, a typical 'shestidesyatnik' (of the 60s generation), and expressed the ideals and hopes of that generation. The predominant mood of the following generation of the Soviet intelligentsia was already resignation and cynicism. They no longer believed in socialist perspectives or in the explanatory power of Marxist theory. It is not surprising that Ilyenkov had such personal difficulties with this situation.*

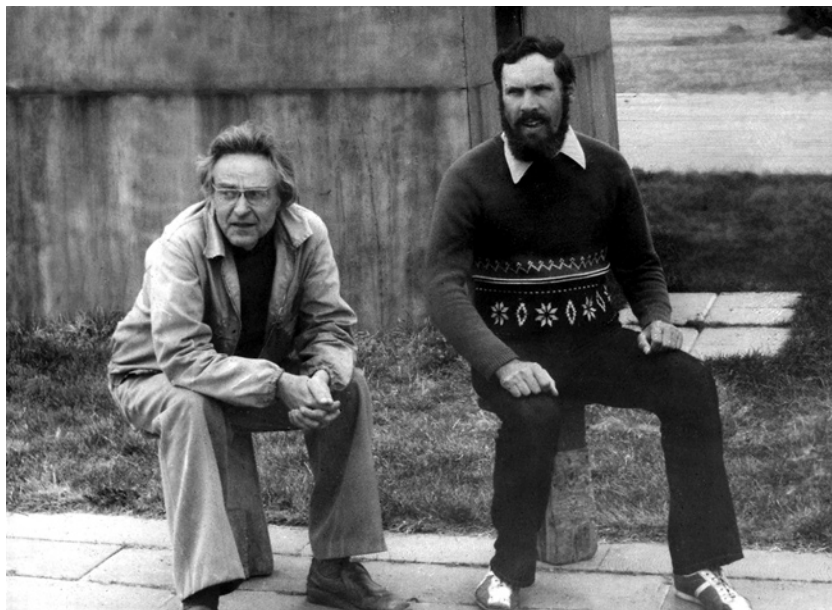


Figure 2. Ilyenkov and Mareev in the Caucasus, Zvartnots, 1978  
(From the Mareev archive).

SM: Here I can only say that the relationship with Marxism was determined by the relationship with socialism, and likewise disillusionment with ‘actually existing socialism’ led to disillusionment in Marxism. By the way, Ilyenkov knew well that Marx could not be held responsible for the crimes of Stalin, and later Khrushchev and Brezhnev, much like Christ cannot be blamed for the actions of the Inquisition in Medieval Europe. For Ilyenkov, Marxism was a *method* of understanding history, including explaining the failures of building ‘developed socialism’, which in the end led to the fall of socialism and the Soviet Union. With regard to the ‘early’ and the ‘late’ Ilyenkov (there are current debates on whether or not Ilyenkov departed from the activity approach in his conception of thought), I must point out that his final work, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*, if judged by its accomplishments, is in no way worse than his very first work, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s Capital*. But his final work elicited a wave of criticism, which included some from former friends and students. But not because Ilyenkov had evolved in a poor direction, as they believed; it was they who had evolved.

*Ilyenkov was a Marxist, but not a ‘diamatchik’. In your 2008 book, From the History of Soviet Philosophy: Lukács – Vygotsky – Ilyenkov, you defend the notion of*

*the existence of a 'subterranean' current in Soviet Marxism, with Ilyenkov as one of the most important representatives of this current. This is a most-interesting thesis. How does your view compare with other historians of Soviet philosophy? For instance, James Scanlan argues that Ilyenkov (as a 'Hegelian') continues the tradition of the 'Dialecticians' of the 1920s, namely the Deborinites.*

SM: As regards Scanlan's version, where Ilyenkov extends Deborin's line (this also pertains to Yegoshua Yakhot, who wrote about Soviet philosophy of the 1920s), I am in firm disagreement. And here I would like to begin with the fact that Ilyenkov met with Deborin in the early 1960s. He told me this himself. But they did not develop a friendship or collaboration. They were very different people in terms of ideology and psychology. It was the same situation between Ilyenkov and Evgeni Petrovich Sitkovsky, who supported Ilyenkov up until the point where criticism of Diamat as a particular historical form of Marxist philosophy proceeded. Ilyenkov believed, as did Marx and Engels, that Marxism inherited from all previous philosophy only dialectics, formal logic and a materialist conception of history. This is precisely what Ilyenkov and his comrade Valentin Korovikov declared in the theses of their presentation at the Faculty of Philosophy at MSU, for which they were expelled from the university. Ilyenkov was against turning materialist dialectics into 'ontology', which is precisely what happened after Gorbachev's *Perestroika*: that which was once called Diamat is now called 'ontology and theory of knowledge'.

In essence, the dogmatism of Diamat secured itself with the help of 'ontology'. In truth, these figures, because of their historical-philosophical ignorance, are unaware that in this manner Wolffianism triumphed over the critical philosophy of Kant. They went backwards from Kant – to Christian Wolff and the French materialists who sought to construct a *system* when, after the great scientific discoveries, materialism, in the words of Engels, became impossible in the form of philosophy becoming simply a scientific *world-view*.

*Yes, but even Mikhail Lifshits wrote in his preface to a posthumous edition of Ilyenkov's essays that he renews the 'best traditions' of the 1930s. In agreement with Lifshits, Ilyenkov continues 'the current' around the journal Literaturny Kritik. However, do you believe such analogies are correct? Is it not perhaps the case that Ilyenkov and other young philosophers of the 1950s started from 'point zero' after the devastation of Stalinism and the World War?*

SM: It is common to come across this method of understanding Ilyenkov's place – when one seeks to adjust him to fit under one or another type or orientation, school, and so on. But such attempts contradict the dialectical method, which

requires that the object be understood in its *uniqueness*, in its *particularities*. Ilyenkov does not fit into any 'paradigm'. This is why he was constantly accused of one thing or another. He was accused of 'gnoseologism' for understanding the categories of dialectics as forms of thought. Then he was accused of denying the specificity of forms of thought, instead grasping them as forms of being, namely accusing him of the exact opposite: 'ontologism'. But, in fact, Ilyenkov developed the idea of the *identity* of being and thought – a central idea, as he demonstrated, in *all* classical philosophy. Here he departs from someone quite close to him, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Lifshits, with whom he shared an antipathy toward old dogmatic orthodoxies. And here one must say a few words about their differences.

They differed first and foremost in their understanding of the *ideal*, which Ilyenkov understood as a form of specifically human activity, which is objectified in the form of the thing. And in reverse: the form of the thing is de-objectified and becomes a form of activity for others. This is how human activity and culture, including the faculty of judgement, taste and sense of beauty, spread and develop. Lifshits believed that here, as he puts it, we owe a debt to Plato and Hegel. But what are Platonic 'ideas' if not *patterns* of human activity, about which Plato himself speaks, albeit ones that are transposed into another world and transformed into disembodied, purely spiritual phenomena. Even there they are *patterns* of activity, but only now the activity of God-Demiurge, which, as the genuine demiurge-craftsman, creates this world.

It is the same thing with Hegel. The accusation of 'Hegelianism' was similarly one constantly directed at Ilyenkov: accusations from the 'right' – official Marxism – and from the 'left' – the 'philosophers of science'. But Marx believed that, according to Hegel, humanity produces itself through its own activity. A careful reader of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* could not miss this central concept. Lenin noted in his *Philosophical Notebooks* that Marx adjoins Hegel, introducing the criterion of practice into the theory of knowledge. Here, however, the word 'criterion' does not accurately reflect the substance of this 'junction' between Marx and Hegel: the matter is not in the criterion, but in *essence*. If everything in Hegel is upside down, then it cannot conceal that all intellectual/spiritual formations are one way or another connected to activity, to labour. His Absolute Spirit is nothing other than that Limit and Ideal towards which humanity aims, and which form the vector of historical development. Marxism does not simply *negate* classical idealism, but it *sublates* it, in the sense of Hegel's term *aufheben*, that is, it *maintains* it by *negating* it. In other words, Marxism confirms the positive content of Platonism and German Idealism, which were worked out over two and a half thousand years. But Diamat loses all this and interprets the ideal in a vulgar materialist way, mostly in the spirit of physiological

materialism: consciousness, thought and the ideal in general are ‘functions’ of the individual brain. In essence, this is a return to French materialism of the eighteenth century.

As regards Lifshits, his position does not propose the elimination of the idealistic understanding of the ideal, it simply *adds* to Diamat the idealism of Plato and Hegel. But Ilyenkov himself never expressed his relationship to Lifshits’s conception of the ideal simply because he was not familiar with it. We only knew of his published work on the history of culture and his work related to the criticism of modernism. On these matters, Ilyenkov and Lifshits were one.

As regards the tradition of the 1930s, and *Literaturny Kritik*, it is difficult to judge the relationship between Ilyenkov and this orientation, but I can say a few words.

In Gorky’s reminiscences about Lenin, the opinion of a worker is cited on the differences between Plekhanov and Lenin. He characterises Plekhanov as a ‘snob’, and Lenin as one of our own. In other words, Lenin was more democratic than Plekhanov. So, some time ago I noted a corresponding parallel for some reason: Ilyenkov is Lenin, and Lifshits is Plekhanov. By the way, one of Lifshits’s works is specifically dedicated to Plekhanov. Ilyenkov also specifically wrote about Lenin, but he never specifically wrote about Plekhanov. So, Ilyenkov was more democratic than Lifshits. He could permit his more junior colleagues to refer to him simply on a first name basis, as ‘Evald’. And it is hard to even imagine that someone would refer to Lifshits as ‘Misha’. Although Ilyenkov was a man of culture and exquisite taste, he was, nevertheless, very tolerant of human frailties and even vices. Lifshits wrote a harsh satire on the writer Marietta Shaginian, picking on some factual inaccuracies, but mostly for her effusive enthusiasm about the success of our country in the construction of communism, for which, however, he suffered, barely holding on to his party ticket. Regarding Shaginian, she was a woman who was genuinely, if not naively, devoted to the Revolution and to Lenin, who, by the way, lived in the same writers’ house as Ilyenkov. He recalled that as children they would visit her and she would treat them to candy. Such a kind lady! Ilyenkov would never lift a finger to write something bad about her, although he could point out her mistakes.

Lifshits considered the 1930s as a period of the rise of Soviet culture that ended, as he believed, in 1939. Following this period began the fall, for which he blames primarily Stalin. However, this might instead be related to that snobbery, which elicited the reaction of less talented democratic intelligentsia. Mayakovsky was ruined not by Stalin – why would Stalin ruin Mayakovsky? Rather he was ruined by his own ‘brothers-by-trade’ with their snobbery. Merab Mamardashvili was a man not without talent, and he wrote at that time apparently good work about

consciousness in Marx and transformed forms, but Ilyenkov spoke and wrote about those same things, only more simply and clearly. While their dislike was mutual, they could not accuse one another of anything – they were simply different people. The difference here is that Mamardashvili was a snob, and this is completely foreign to Ilyenkov. Vadim Mezhev, who knew both of them well, wrote about this recently.

*So, Ilyenkov and other young philosophers of the 1950s did, after all, begin from 'point zero' after the devastations of Stalinism? Or did they attempt to establish a direct connection to classical philosophy, for instance, with Spinoza and Hegel, from whom they took their ideas?*

SM: In my book on Ilyenkov, I wrote that he *discovered Spinoza for us*. It is not that we did not know Spinoza; there were debates on him between Luybov Isaakovna Akselrod and Abram Moiseevich Deborin back in the 1920s. But their entire debate focused on whether the principle of determinism is maintained in relation to the transition from quantity into quality. Akselrod took Spinoza as an ally, but only as a strict, mechanistic determinist. A collection of essays about Spinoza, where he was interpreted mainly as an atheist and a theomachist, came out in connection to the 300th anniversary of his birth. But Ilyenkov discovered Spinoza for us as the founder of the *activity interpretation* of thought. In this regard, Spinoza is a forerunner of German classical philosophy from Kant to Hegel, as well as Marxism. Ilyenkov agreed that Marxism was a variety of Spinozism, as Engels had characterised it in conversation with Plekhanov. For Ilyenkov, Marxism was the culmination of the development of all previous intellectual culture, and above all the development of philosophy. All philosophical culture is concentrated in the history of philosophy, and there can be no philosophy beyond the history of philosophy. As Engels remarked, all of the major forms of the philosophical world-view were already present among the Greeks. Windelband said something similar. If one examines Marx's creative output, it is impossible to find one idea that does not have historical roots.

Similarly, there is not one work by Ilyenkov that is not in one way or another a work about the history of philosophy. There were some good historians of philosophy in the Soviet Union – Asmus or Chernyshev, for instance – but it is difficult to identify anyone in particular who influenced Ilyenkov in this direction. As regards contemporary history of philosophy in Russia, current historians do not generally write the history of philosophy, but the history of philosophers. A well-known historian of philosophy, Anatoly Fedorovich Zotov, said somewhere that today they mainly write reference books.

*The discussions around Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal were particularly acute, but it appears that psychologists immediately began to adopt an Ilyenkovian point of view. Here is an interesting line of reception!*

SM: Here, I must say something about Ilyenkov's article on the ideal in the five-volume Soviet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which of all his works made the deepest impression, not only on philosophy, but also on psychology, and simply on culture.

By the way, it was the well-known and respected psychologist Aleksey Nikolaevich Leontyev, with whom Ilyenkov closely collaborated, who contributed to this publication. This conception was more important for psychologists than for anyone else: psychologists know well that mental forms – such as consciousness, thought, memory, human feelings, and so on – are ideal. Ideal in the simple sense that they are not corporeal, not material. This property of the forms of human mentality is inexplicable from the physiology of the brain, as all the processes that occur in the human brain are *material*. This property is likewise inexplicable from the mentality of an individual; the mentality of an individual must itself be explained by means of something else. Religion explained this as the divine nature of man, Platonism – 'ideas' as independent spiritual entities. Ilyenkov decisively broke with both physiological materialism (on which Diamat was based) and Platonism.

As I said, Ilyenkov collaborated with psychologists and educators, including Leontyev and Davydov, who at that time were considered authoritative and whose ideas resonated with what Ilyenkov was doing. Generally the philosophical public and the philosophical authorities related to him negatively, having been raised on Diamat. I have written about the attitude toward Ilyenkov of the Director of the Institute of Philosophy USSR, Ukraintsev, for whom the views of Narsky and Dubrovsky – who argued that the ideal was something subjective, inherent only in the individual, and based on neuro-physiological processes – were naturally closer. This point of view, in its various modifications, is fully consistent with the structures of officially recognised Diamat. It is worth mentioning here that in the 1930s the work of Ivan Pavlov was placed under Diamat, and they tried to connect *Istmat* to Darwinism. So, not understanding the philosophical discussions, the party leadership listened to the opinion of the philosophical leadership among the *Diamatchiki*.

It is no accident that pedagogical psychology and pedagogical practice more generally were important for Ilyenkov. Here he saw an opportunity to realise and confirm his Marxist theory of consciousness. Following the classics, Ilyenkov believed that the specificity of the human mind is that it constantly exceeds its own borders; it is an infinitely expanding universe. But we become smarter when

we make our world smarter. And we are always smarter than that world if we are able to see its flaws. This also applies to machines, including 'thinking' machines. And how does a machine 'think'? That same computer, everyone knows, is so smart that each time I type the word 'Petty' – meaning the English economist William Petty – it always 'corrects' 'Petty' into the Russian name 'Petya'. And my command is once again required for it to stop doing that.

But seriously speaking, it is necessary to recall Ilyenkov's 1968 book, *Ob idolakh I idealakh* (*Of Idols and Ideals*) in which he strongly opposes the idea of creating 'artificial intelligence' which will be smarter than humans. The border, which a 'thinking' machine cannot overcome, is the ability to think dialectically, that is, to sublimate and to broaden contradictions. But people broaden contradictions primarily in practice, in situations of moral choice, in acts of aesthetic contemplation. This is, in fact, the human mind, our intellect, which can be imitated only by becoming human.

Many 'progressively' minded philosophers believed that Ilyenkov was retrograde and opposed scientific progress. But Ilyenkov acted in all these matters as a radical democrat because consistent democracy presupposes equal opportunity for all people, and it presupposes education accessible to all, including those who today are described as having limited potential, or as 'disabled'. This democracy is evident in Ilyenkov in relation to his participation in the so-called 'Zagorsk Experiment'. Zagorsk – to which its original name has been returned: Sergiev Posad – is a city near Moscow, which had a boarding school for deaf-blind children. With Ilyenkov's informal involvement in this boarding school, they were able to prepare four students for admission to Moscow University to the Faculty of Psychology, which they completed in 1976. This was the first time in the world. Prior to this, hardly anyone was able to reach this level of development. For instance, there was Olga Skorokhodova (1914–82) – a student of Ivan Afanasyevich Sokolyansky, who laid the foundations of this method, implemented by his pupil Aleksandr Ivanovich Meshcheryakov in Zagorsk. Another is the American Helen Keller (1880–1968). The method applied in Zagorsk is expressed in a simple maxim: human behaviour forms first, then human speech. The method of Sokolyansky and Meshcheryakov was used deliberately. In the case of Helen Keller, this happened by accident, as she was raised not by professional educators, but by a girl who worked for her parents who taught her those occupations that are related to life and work on the farm.

However, Ilyenkov's opponents likewise tried to discredit his participation in this experiment, 'revealing' that the experiment was 'flawed' since these students had residual vision and hearing. But virtually all blind or deaf children have residual vision or hearing. However, in commonly accepted forms of education, these children are unable to complete not only higher education, but even



normal schooling. They remain disabled not only in the physical, but also in the social sense.

*Although Ilyenkov was a Marxist, his ideas were not well received by Soviet philosophy. How do we explain such a strange situation? Who were Ilyenkov's principal opponents? It seems that his main critics, such as Dubrovsky or Narsky, were not party ideologues, but professional philosophers. What is your view?*

SM: I cannot say that Ilyenkov had no like-minded colleagues. Even in the 1970s, when he was barely tolerated at the Institute of Philosophy, he had friends in the philosophy department at Rostov University, which was then headed by Yuriy Andreyevich Zhdanov. His former classmate, Aleksey Vasilyevich Potemkin, taught in that department. Ilyenkov's student, Aleksey Novokhatko, also taught there. As did Aleksey Shchitov – both of whom educated their students in the spirit of Ilyenkov. This past year, I was at a conference on Soviet philosophy in Bernkastel, Germany, where I met a graduate of that department (from the former GDR) and immediately recognised the influence of this tradition on her views. However, I understand that today the philosophy department at Rostov is very different.

Certainly, the position of Narsky and Dubrovsky in those days was also considered Marxist, but between this 'Marxism' and the Marxism of Ilyenkov there lies an abyss. As regards the ideal, Ilyenkov, as I said above, explained it not from physiology, but from what lies at the heart of social development: from material production, in which humanity produces not only necessary material objects, but also its thoughts, feelings and ideals, that is to say, it produces itself. In other words, it produces the ideal. As Marx said, humanity directly idealises reality in its activity. Mikhail Lifshits said that through its labour humanity stylises reality. But Lifshits went no further in this direction, but instead went toward Plato and Hegel.

People idealise reality not in their 'heads', but above all in the same space in which they act. 'Ideal objects' are not our ideas about real objects, but those objects themselves, only resulting from human activity, human labour. Natural clay is a natural object. When a potter makes from this clay a wine jug, it is no longer a natural object, but a *human* object, whose form is *ideal* because it is *conceived* from the perspective of being used as an object in people's lives. It is also *ideal* because in this form is the materialised and objectified *form of human activity* in terms of the production of this object. And if we found a similar form in nature, then we would call it ideal only because we already have such a concept, developed in our activity, in our culture. This is the exact opposite of how this issue is understood by proponents of the naturalistic understanding of the ideal, where 'ideal' refers to *pure forms* of natural objects, such as the form of

crystal or a snow flake or a flower, and so on – forms that are transferred into human culture. But, on the contrary, it is precisely because we are beings of culture and have the notion of the ideal that we are able to *admire* natural forms as *beautiful*. Animals do not admire nature, because they are themselves beings of nature; they simply consume it. Feuerbach saw the specificity of human sensory perception in ideality. But he could not explain the ideality of human feelings, and simply attributed them to the nature of human anthropology. Here, Feuerbach did not go beyond Hegel and all German philosophy, but stepped back to Rousseau and Herder.

People see beauty in nature only because we apply to nature human measure. But this human measure is the universal measure of that nature, which people draw from nature, transforming it with their activity. This is why people are not subjective in their assessment of the beauty of nature, as it is often claimed, but are entirely objective.

Ilyenkov never denied that the ideal is associated with the activity of the brain; but the point is that, being associated with the brain, the ideal is not subjective, but has a completely objective meaning, including the meaning of the social ideal that finds its expression in religion, art, philosophy and other forms of 'objective spirit'. One would never say that religion exists only in one's 'head', that God is in one's head. The physiological interpretation of the ideal is not able to explain why the idea of the 'death' of God suddenly arose in the heads of so many people. Did something suddenly happen to people's brains? Or did something happen in society? Here we must pay a debt to Hegel for whom the ideal exists in forms of 'objective spirit' – art, religion, as I mentioned above. It is quite simple to make a materialist reversal, *Umstülpung*, without any loss of content, by calling all of this Culture, which although created by separate 'heads', nevertheless imposes on our 'heads' tastes, preferences, in a word, our ideals.

In Soviet Marxism, all this was called 'social consciousness'. Clearly, according to *Istmat*, 'social consciousness' had a social character. But that is in *Istmat*. But in *Diamat*, consciousness was understood as a 'function of the brain'. And so it appeared that there were 'two consciousnesses' in Marxism, a 'bifurcation' of consciousness. But this is the result of the 'bifurcation' of Marxist philosophy in the Soviet period, which did not exist in Marx or Engels or Lenin. And Ilyenkov, in contrast to the official *Diamat-Istmat* interpretation, believed that Marxism consisted of nothing other than the materialist understanding of history, and materialist dialectics are first and foremost dialectics of the historical process.

*One of the targets of Ilyenkov's criticism was those tendencies in the life of Soviet society that he called 'positivist'. Could it be said that while the 'surface' ideology of the Soviet Union was Marxism-Leninism, its 'secret' ideology was scientism?*

SM: I love to tell my students (or rather 'loved' because I barely have any now) about Heraclitus of Ephesus who burst into tears from despair and anguish when he heard from his fellow citizens ancient myths that he regarded as fairy tales because the citizens believed everything they heard. Similarly, Ilyenkov 'cried' when he heard fairy tales about thoughts being material, that one could create artificial intelligence smarter than humans, and so on.

It is easy to reason that positivism became the official world-view in the late Soviet epoch, and that in response to official scientism arose anti-scientism, which was founded by humanistically-minded philosophers. Yes, there were both the former and the latter among philosophers. But for Ilyenkov this dilemma was false from the start. I recall how he said that cybernetics is a good thing, but there is no need to turn it into another 'corn'.<sup>3</sup> What he meant was that no science, including cybernetics, should be taken as the ideal and as the means of solving all problems. It is precisely from this that positivism and scientism grows. But at the other extreme, where solutions to all problems are sought in religion, morality and moralism, and most commonly, pure verbiage – these were not for Ilyenkov. He was certainly far from this kind of 'humanism', which it must be said is popular among our philosophers even today.

Humanism was impossible for Ilyenkov without the individual acquiring all the riches developed by humanity, including a scientific world-view and technical accomplishments. A separate matter is the issue of what is possible given certain socio-political changes, which according to Marxism are associated with Communism. In this regard, he took seriously the achievements of the socialist revolution for bringing the achievements of world culture to common people.

The problem of violence on the path toward this acquisition of culture is a matter for a separate discussion. And the fact that socialism in its early stages resolves common (engineer's) problems, without regard to culture and human problems, is also not exactly correct. We cannot forget about the 'cultural revolution', about cultural centres, museums, and so on, which, in fact, are in a terrible state in today's Russia.

*So we can talk about alienation under socialism? There were vibrant discussions about this in the 1960s, although the ruling Communist Parties in the socialist countries sought to drown them out. What was Ilyenkov's position in this dispute?*

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3. This refers to Khrushchev's fascination with corn after his trip to the US where he discovered livestock being fed maize. And we began to plant corn even in places where it does not grow.

SM: This is a difficult question to answer because one can easily be misunderstood. First, Ilyenkov never used the term 'alienation'. Why? He never explained in great detail. The only thing I heard from him is that Marx in *Capital* no longer speaks of 'alienation', but about 'exploitation'. Indeed, if we think about it, 'alienation' in its original juridical sense means the transfer of some goods from one legal entity to another by sale, gift, and so on. According to Marx, capitalist exploitation means a gratuitous appropriation by the capitalist of a portion of the labour of a hired worker in the form of surplus product. But this is what the early Marx calls the 'alienation of labour', which lies at the heart of all forms of alienation, about which much can be said.

Second, I think that he avoided the term 'alienation' because after the publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* there was some speculation associated with this term, including the notion that the 'alienation' of human nature stems from the 'anthropological nature' of humanity, which would mean that it were indestructible, eternal, and so on. This is precisely how 'alienation' was understood by existentialism. In the 1960s, we had an across-the-board fascination with existentialism, first Sartre and Camus, and then Heidegger. Ilyenkov viewed this enthusiasm with scepticism.

Now, with respect to socialism, the crucial difference between Ilyenkov and official Marxism is his view that socialism is a transitional form, that is, something incomplete, not a 'formation'. In general, this is a system, as Marx wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in which remains the 'narrow horizon of bourgeois rights'. But the morality of such a society cannot be bourgeois. This is the colossal contradiction of 'actually existing socialism'. The principle of 'to each according to their labour' is not a socialist principle, because it also applies to simple commodity production, only there the measure of one's socially-necessary labour is 'recognised' by the market. But under socialism, it is determined by a state official, who makes the state, as Marx said, his property. And as any property owner, he wants to extract profit from his property. Stalin resolved this contradiction very simply: this is what the Gulag was for, the inhabitants of which were not predominantly workers and peasants, but mostly officials, directors of factories, directors of stores and other managers.

But when Stalinist socialism was replaced by the idea of 'socialism with a human face', and officials could no longer be sent to Kolyma, they not only took full control of the country, but they ultimately converted their power into property, into something entirely real-material, as we saw during so-called 'perestroika'. Ilyenkov understood that if under socialism the 'narrow horizon of bourgeois rights' remains, then 'alienation' also remains. His solution to this problem was to give property rights to those who labour – farmers, barbers, mechanics, workers in small retail outlets, and so on. That is, privatisation should

have happened from below. But party and state officials did not want to accommodate working people, and so we got privatisation from above. Consequently, instead of a layer of small property owners, we got an oligarchy with whom now Putin struggles with little success.

To this, I can only add that, for Ilyenkov, the most hated layer of the community was the officialdom, the bureaucracy. But he was not pleased by all the talk about 'humanism', 'socialism with a human face', and so on, because he knew well what would follow. And what followed is what we have now – the same bureaucracy but without a human face.

*It is well known that Marx proclaimed in the Theses on Feuerbach that philosophy, in the old sense, has come to an end. Likewise, you have stated, citing Marx and Lenin, that only formal and dialectical logic remain. And so did Ilyenkov. His position is understandable, as Diamat renews the old metaphysics on the basis of Marxism, which means that criticism of Diamat is, at the same time, criticism of certain metaphysical claims. But was Ilyenkov himself not a philosopher?*

SM: Vadim Mezhuev wrote an article that characterises Ilyenkov as the last classical philosopher, referring to his Spinozist and Hegelian sympathies. Indeed, the question of philosophy in the twentieth century, which according to Marx was supposed to come to an end, is quite complex. It appears that Marx's prognosis about the end of philosophy, much like the victory of the proletariat, did not materialise. So the question becomes: how should we relate to Marx? Well, this is the heart of the matter: for Ilyenkov, Marx was neither a futurologist nor a political scientist. What Ilyenkov mainly took from Marx, as has been said, is his method. Marx's method of concrete historicism enables us to understand why Marx's prognoses appeared real in the nineteenth century, but were not realised in the twentieth. The same method of comprehending facts in their relations permits it to be used even today. I spoke with Ilyenkov about Leninism and Stalinism in the analysis of which he never slipped into 'humanist' pathetics.

*The view that what is most important in Marx is the method, that is, the dialectical method, recalls the young Lukács who, in History and Class Consciousness, argued that orthodox Marxism consists not in adhering to certain concrete claims, but rather adhering only to the method.*

SM: What Lukács wrote about the heart of Marxism being its method repeats well-known passages from Marx and Lenin almost verbatim: 'not doctrine, but method'. Lenin believed that Marx's *Capital* supplied a method of understanding bourgeois (and not only bourgeois) society. On the other hand, method is

not something external to content, as Hegel said; it is not an external frame into which any content could be squeezed. Rather, it is the 'soul' of the content, or the backbone, the support of the content, as Vygotsky wrote. This is something we do not find in the 'early' Lukács, and even the 'later' Lukács did not understand this well. I believe it is for this reason we find in Lukács the appearance of the *Ontology of Social Being*: as soon as method was severed, dogmatic content started to appear, and instead of a materialist understanding of history, 'ontology' appears.

And now we have 'ontology' anywhere and everywhere. Apparently, according to the nomenclature devised by our philosophical officials, I too am an 'ontologist', although I have always considered myself a dialectical Marxist. Certainly, Ilyenkov never talked about 'ontology'; rather, he wrote specifically about the identity of Being and Thought. Here, we can repeat Parmenides' well-known aphorism: Being and thought about Being are identical. 'Thought about Being', namely Logic, is not simply a likeness; it is identical to forms of being. This is the essence of Ilyenkov's position. Only on this basis is the union of philosophy and the natural sciences possible. I must point out that not only psychologists but also physicists and chemists approached Ilyenkov to work out logical-methodological questions. Here, Ilyenkov opposed two extreme positions. On the one hand, he opposed philosophy imposing its understanding of logic and the scientific method on to the natural sciences, as Deborin had done, by the way. On the other hand, he was also opposed to philosophy simply 'generalising' the results of the natural sciences, because then, Ilyenkov believed, it would lose its own subject. He always underscored that there must be an equal union.

*Let's return to the status of philosophy among the sciences. Ilyenkov was, after all, then a philosopher?*

SM: Ilyenkov was in agreement with Hegel that philosophy is the highest form of human consciousness because it gives consciousness other forms (such as art, religion, politics, morality), which do not have their own consciousness, as it were. An artist, for instance, creates, as Schelling believed, unconsciously. He is guided by feelings – a sense of proportion, a sense of beauty. In this sense, artistic creativity, as Goethe believed, resembles the creativity of nature. It is similar with religion. In religion, as Feuerbach demonstrated, humanity doubles itself and worships itself, as reflected in the mirror of heaven. But consciousness of the very process of doubling, its 'mechanism', is the business of philosophy and of the philosopher. Feuerbach was one such philosopher. The artist does not have a conception of art; the religious person does not have a conception of religion; the politician does not have a conception of politics. This conception is provided

only by philosophy, although nothing prevents the artist, politician, and so on, from becoming a philosopher. In general, it is more difficult for a priest or a religious person to become a philosopher. The whole history of Christianity shows that as soon as a believer would begin to consider his belief, he would fall into 'heresy'.

The old materialism, as already mentioned, does not provide a method, as the ideal appears as either a purely subjective phenomenon from which it easily slips into subjectivism and solipsism (for example, Berkeley), or it begins to make 'debts' to objective idealism. It does not have its own method for disclosing the content of the ideal. The same is true of Diamat, which, despite all the talk about dialectics and the 'limits' of the old materialism, was itself a variety of that same vulgar materialism.

Diamat was 'vulgar' not only in the sense of 'crude', but also in the sense of 'ordinary' and the 'popular', because the view that the ideal exists inside the human 'head' is acquired without much effort by the head of an uneducated person. Such a person might even become offended when told that the ideal is not at all there. Similarly, today's youth easily acquires the thought that the ideal is something subjective and relative. After all, it immediately frees a person from all moral responsibility. This state of affairs is enough to lead one to despair. And our 'philosophers' cannot understand what made Ilyenkov so upset that he no longer wanted to live in this world. And looking at our lives today, it may be a good thing that he did not live to see this.

# Prospects for a Cultural-Historical Psychology of Intelligence

Birger Siebert

If we enrich Vygotsky's ideas with Ilyenkov's basic postulates, modern psychology and pedagogy will take a considerable step forward in the study of the genesis and development of consciousness and of the individual subject of activity.<sup>1</sup>

Working on problems of psychology, Lev S. Vygotsky became increasingly aware that for scientific psychology, philosophical (in particular, epistemological) reflection on its theoretical concepts is of great significance. Problems and contradictions among theoretical concepts often can only be solved if they are placed in a more general scientific context. In the case of the cultural-historical theory, Vygotsky demonstrated this in his writings on the crisis of psychology, as well as in his work on a monistic theory of emotions.

But whilst Vygotsky took into account the connection between philosophy and the concrete sciences from the viewpoint of psychology and pedagogy, E.V. Ilyenkov approached the same problem 'from the other end', as a philosopher. He was keenly interested in the methodological problems of psychology and pedagogy, and in this respect he attempted to overcome the formal separation between philosophy and the concrete sciences. It is no exaggeration to say that Ilyenkov's works provide ideas for a theoretical framework of a cultural-historical psychology that rejects the dualism of body and mind inherent in many psychological theories.

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1. Davydov 1998, p. 92.



The significance of Ilyenkov's ideas becomes especially obvious in regard to the concept of intelligence. Below I wish to present one possible way of reflecting on the concept of intelligence, on the basic scientific ideas underlying it, as well as the prospects for a cultural-historical perspective on intelligence. Intelligence as a psychological concept is not only bereft of a general definition,<sup>2</sup> but it can also be seen as a classical example of deterministic and dualistic views on thought and the human consciousness.

### The 'problem of abilities'

Ilyenkov's article on the 'problem of abilities' is an example of a reflexive method for dealing with psychological concepts afflicted by contradictions. According to him, this problem is primarily due to the fact that no clearly defined concept of abilities has been formulated so far. Instead, different antagonistic theorems coexist. Ilyenkov writes:

By this term one understands:

- 1 The actual realizable capacity to carry out acts (operations) of a certain type;
- 2 The pure potential (pure possibility) to appropriate schemes of these actions, to learn to build one's own actions in accordance to them; and
- 3 A certain 'predisposition' of the individual to this or that specific activity sphere (mathematics, music, poetry etc.); – in this case 'ability' is a synonym for 'talent' or 'gift', i.e. for the degree of development of the relevant abilities in the individual.

All three (at least) aspects are constantly confused with each other, which fact contributes neither to their reciprocal understanding nor to an essential understanding of the problem as such, since they determine both the orientation of investigators as well as the results of the investigation.<sup>3</sup>

In discussing the concept of abilities, Ilyenkov focuses mainly on the aspect of the social mediation and the social character of human thinking and acting, and, in that connection, describes human abilities as social and historical in 'nature'. In this context, according to Ilyenkov, Hegel's contribution to an understanding of human abilities can be seen as essential even for a materialist approach to the concept. Hegel regarded the human being as a social being and not as an abstract and isolated individual:

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2. See Sternberg and Detterman 1986; Roth 1998.

3. Ilyenkov 1994d, p. 294.

Here, for the first time, not the individual as such has been acknowledged as the subject of 'abilities', in abstraction from everything which it owes to society and history, but just that grandiose 'ensemble' of individuals reciprocally influencing each other that really creates political history, science, art, and technology as well as all the other universal-human forms of culture.<sup>4</sup>

However, Ilyenkov criticises Hegel with the remark that his philosophy, despite the theory of the social character of human abilities, still legitimated the predominant social and political organisation of the society as 'natural'. The lack of higher education amongst the main part of society's members has been attributed merely to the bodily nature of these persons and thereby declared as an absolute necessity. The combination of both ideas – the social nature of human abilities, on the one hand, and the naturalisation of social differences, on the other – implies the naturalisation of the human at the level of psychology. According to Ilyenkov, Hegel assumes that the factual differences between men are a product of their individual biological nature, instead of regarding them as a result of the differences in the social conditions of their life. Ilyenkov concludes: 'Thus, Hegel reproduces the main mistake of the traditional concept of "abilities" by shifting the blame for the inequality of men in regard to their practiced ways of living on to altogether innocent mother nature'.<sup>5</sup>

The 'problem of abilities' is a general one affecting all scientific psychology. Even today, naturalist theories separate human thought from its social prerequisites and reduce it immediately to the person's genetic constitution or brain physiology. This kind of approach claims that social differences are in reality quasi-natural psychological differences. Therefore, following Ilyenkov, we could speak of the 'problem of intelligence' in addition to the 'problem of abilities'.

Briefly, two general points of view can be distinguished within the psychology of intelligence. First, formal theories on intelligence often see this ability as a mental energy or as a result of individual human genetic constitution. In addition, Jean Piaget regards intelligence as a developmental process, starting as an organic or natural fact and becoming socialised in the ongoing development of the child's forms of activity. As both Ilyenkov and Vygotsky see them, these approaches can be ascribed to Cartesian ideas on the relation of body and mind. A critical consideration of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, and a reflection on Spinoza's philosophy, poses a challenge to this theory of thought and its basic implications.

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4. Ilyenkov 1994d, p. 296.

5. Ilyenkov 1994d, p. 300.

## Ilyenkov's Spinozistic theory of thought

Ilyenkov analyses both ideas – the naturalist reduction of human thinking to a bodily state or to the subject's genetic constitution, as well as the theory of thought as a mental energy – with reference to the distinction between philosophical monism and dualism, assigning each to dualism. The basis of this distinction is the 'Gordian knot' inherent in the Cartesian reply to the question of the relation of thought and being. They are seen as substances which exist independently of each other and are *causa sui*, that is, the causes of their own existence. Thus, thought as a substance is in its existence free of any necessary relation to the bodily or physical world.

In his 1996 work Vygotsky showed a possible consequence of this idea for psychology in his analysis of different approaches to a theory of emotions. On the one hand, biologically oriented models claim that emotions do not exist as psychological facts or as an aspect of consciousness, regarding them instead as purely physical. On the other hand, the theory of thinking as a mental energy is originally a Cartesian idea too. For Descartes, the mediation of the two substances comes into being because they both coincide in the human being. He believed that an organ in the human body, the pineal gland, is the site of this process, assuming it to be a transformation of mind into matter and of matter into mind. According to Vygotsky, James and Lange follow Descartes' idea of *esprits animaux*. Their theory of emotions implies as well a naturalistic view of the human psyche, because it takes the emotions to be a disembodied psychic energy and thereby a pure form detached from any and every object-relation.

Ilyenkov subscribes to Spinoza's views on the relation of thought and being. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza formulates an objection to Descartes' dualism by assuming that there is only one substance. He argues that two substances, providing that both exist, would have existence itself as a common quality and, accordingly, he declares existence, namely God, to be the only substance. Thought and extension, or the world of body, thus become attributes of this only substance, and Spinoza lays down a general basis for philosophy where the question of the mediation of thought and being as substances no longer arises. In his reception of Spinoza, Ilyenkov, on the one hand, emphasises this negation of the question of mediation as cutting the Gordian knot. On the other hand, he underlines Spinoza's monism with regard to a theory of the subject. The subject is now seen as the unity of the thinking body and not as composed of a spirit and a separately existing body:

There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation, body and thought, but only one single object which is the thinking body of

living, real man . . . , only considered from two different and even opposing aspects or points of view. Living, real thinking man . . . does not consist of two Cartesian halves, 'thought lacking a body' and a 'body lacking thought'.<sup>6</sup>

Thanks to this turn, the concept of thought acquires a genetic dimension. According to Ilyenkov, thought is not something pre-existing which animates the body separate from it, but develops as a mode of being of the body in the world. He assumes that the genesis of thought in the individual subject consists in the interiorisation of the trajectory of the movements of the thinking body. The thinking body is able to relate actively to the surrounding world while the inanimate body is passive:

The cardinal distinction between the mode of action of a thinking body and the mode of movement of any other body . . . is that the thinking body actively builds (constructs) the form (trajectory) of its movement in space in accordance with the form (the configuration or the state) of another body, making the form of its movements (its actions) agree with the form of this other body and, moreover, with the form of any other body. Therefore, the genuine specific form of the action of a thinking body is universality.<sup>7</sup>

At the level of human development, this relation between the subject, its activity and the external world is expressed in the concept of free will, that is, the subject's ability to purposefully create its own activity:

An action that overcomes the servile dependence on the surrounding (contingent, single) circumstances/conditions, is therefore also an elementary act of freedom, an action in accordance with a purpose (recognized need).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Ilyenkov's Spinozist theory of thought refutes the idea of mind or spirit existing as a kind of pure and disembodied form in the world. Above all, he argues that the theory that defines the human psyche as mental energy leaves out the idea of thought as necessarily object-related: 'Thought as such is the same kind of fallacious abstraction as emptiness. In fact, it is only a property, a predicate, an attribute of that very body which has spatial attributes'.<sup>9</sup>

Ilyenkov's approach to the philosophical concept of thought is not restricted to the reception of Spinoza's ideas. His theory of the ideal can instead be seen as a philosophical foundation of a theory of consciousness. Beginning with Spinoza's *Ethics*, Ilyenkov regarded thinking as an activity of the living or thinking body. The interiorisation or appropriation of the external world and its

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6. Ilyenkov 1994a, p. 59.

7. Ilyenkov cited in Bakhurst 1991, p. 250.

8. Ilyenkov, 1994b, p. 94.

9. Ilyenkov 1994a, p. 60.

representation in the subject's mind constitute the specific content as well as the genesis of this activity. Ilyenkov addressed these questions in the context of his theory of the ideal.<sup>10</sup>

The ideal exists in a double manner. First, it exists outside the individual person as the social meaning of objects and as the purposes of human activity manifested in a variety of forms, for example, in language or in the purposeful structure of objects created by human activity. Ilyenkov contends that in this objectivity the subject confronts the ideal as an entity that exists independently of his or her individual consciousness and thought, but is at the same time the primary object of his or her activity and appropriation: 'It is a fact that every individual must, from childhood, reckon far more carefully with demands and restrictions than with the immediately perceptible appearance of external 'things' and situations, or the organic attractions, desires, and needs of his or her individual body'.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the ideal exists in a subjective form as the individual's consciousness. As such, it is first of all the internalisation of the external world and, as the consciousness of man, is constituted by the appropriation of external objects and their social meaning. The appearance of these objects in the subject's mind is also ideal, namely representations mediated by the individual's activity. That is why, according to Ilyenkov, thought is not identical with the neural brain processes. These processes are only the bodily precondition for thought as a form of cognitive activity. In the form of thought the subject appropriates the surrounding world in ideal images or representations. Thus, the development of thought appears as the development of the various forms of representation.

Ilyenkov's theory of thinking rejects the views which separate thinking from its object-relations and define it as a mental energy, or which reduce it to the natural and physical processes of the human brain. A psychological theory based on his ideas about consciousness and thinking regards both as object-related. It thus contains at the same time the postulate of development with the assumption that a theory of thought has to take into account its genesis as mediated by the subject's access to the external world. Accordingly, intelligence shows itself to be object-oriented and developing, as well being the result of appropriation.

For this reason, Piaget's psychogenetic theory of intelligence is much closer to a cultural-historical approach than any formal model of intelligence. However, his idea of socialisation as a form of natural development leads to difficulties. Ilyenkov argues that the senso-motoric schemata do not form purely logical or cognitive structures in the consciousness of the child, but are above all social and object-oriented:

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10. Ilyenkov 1977; 1994f.

11. Ilyenkov 1977, p. 77.

From the beginning the child is not confronted with the sheer environment, but with an essentially humanized environment, in which things and their relations have a social-historical meaning. Likewise, the senso-motoric schemata that take form in the process of human ontogenesis correspond to it.<sup>12</sup>

As with the concept of abilities, a critical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy opens prospects for a concept of intelligence that comes close to Ilyenkov's philosophical, psychological and pedagogical ideas. For this to be possible a distinction should be made between the terms 'thought' and 'intelligence', since Ilyenkov and Hegel use them in different ways. In his reception of Spinoza's philosophy, Ilyenkov characterises thought implicitly as the genesis of mental or psychic activities that enable the living body to be active in the world, this being the general distinction between the thinking and the non-thinking body.

Accordingly, thought in its general form is attributable to non-human life although it obtains qualitatively new forms of sociality and universality in its particular human form of existence. By contrast, in Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, intelligence is defined as the specific activity of the human mind whereas thought is defined as a particular form of this 'theoretical spirit', that is to say, as a particular form of intelligence. This difference is not of fundamental significance for the discussion of a cultural-historical concept of intelligence, because it can be restricted to the examination of human consciousness. Hegel's theory thus treats intelligence, in the Ilyenkovian sense, as the genesis of universality or the freedom of the subject.

### Prospects for a cultural-historical concept of intelligence

As regards scientific psychology, Piaget's approach is one of the rare attempts to locate the concept of the intelligence in the development of the psyche. According to Güssbacher, Hegel thought in a similar manner, although the latter's own intentions turned intelligence itself into the acting subject and the subject into its predicate. As a result, 'the individual became alienated from his/her own activity'.<sup>13</sup> However, an essential difference between Piaget's genetic epistemology and Hegel's approach is that the latter does not see the development of intelligence as a formal process or as an increase in complexity. He regards it rather as a process of qualitative changes experienced by the subject. These developing forms of intelligence enable the person to have access, in different ways, to the external world: 'Hegel sets up a concept of intelligence as the psychogenesis of envisaging, imagining and thinking by reconstructing

12. Ilyenkov 1994c, p. 292.

13. Güssbacher 1988, p. 24.

their formation'.<sup>14</sup> This corresponds to Hegel's view on the human mind or intellect as active in substance, rather than as 'resting'.<sup>15</sup> Since the genesis of these intellectual activities is based on the interiorisation and appropriation of the external world, this process can also be described as the origin of intelligence, which is thus not only defined as active but also as object-oriented. The course of its development is directed towards the universality of acting and thinking, according to Ilyenkov.

According to Güssbacher, intelligence does not develop independently of the external living conditions of the subject. For this reason, the genesis of its developed form, conceptual thinking, should not be seen as a necessity in the child's ontogenesis, but as being dependent on the social preconditions of development. It has already been mentioned that Ilyenkov refutes Hegel's thesis according to which social differences among individual subjects result from their bodily differences. Güssbacher's interpretation of Hegel's psychology of intelligence also avoids this conclusion, which legitimates socially produced inequalities as natural. In his view, the school 'as the institutionalized form of education [defines] the general circumstances under which every single individual has to develop his/her intelligence'.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the development of the subject's intelligence is related to teaching and learning, that is, the forms of its social mediation. This position is similar to that of cultural-historical theory. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development as well as Davydov's and El'konin's theory of developmental teaching are based on the idea that teaching can direct or support (and even prevent) a child's development. In contrast, Piaget regarded development as a process that is independent of teaching and instruction – a viewpoint that was extensively criticised by Vygotsky, Davydov and El'konin. According to them, Piaget separates teaching from instruction and by so doing removes the social influences of learning from human development, regarding the latter as a process of maturation. Teaching, then, is based on development only and is without influence on it. As a consequence, the subject's intelligence appears as socialised, but not as primarily social or social in its origin.

Güssbacher's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy takes a stand on this topic that seems closer to those of both cultural-historical theory and Ilyenkov's pedagogical premises. He claims that intelligence is social and the result of the human individual's appropriation of the external world. However, the most important conclusion that can be drawn from this may be that intelligence or intelligent thinking, that is to say, conceptual thinking, can be acquired. Compared to

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14. Güssbacher 1988, p. 23.

15. See Hegel 1995, *Enzyklopädie*, §378, Zusatz.

16. Güssbacher 1988, 346.

present-day theoretical approaches, this is a rather exceptional position that opens up a new perspective on the concept of intelligence. Following this view, 'intelligent teaching' oriented to the formation of theoretical concepts is a precondition for the development of the subject's intelligence toward theoretical thinking. In this context, Ilyenkov agrees<sup>17</sup> above all with Davydov's theory and supports the idea of teaching theoretical concepts on the basis of practical activity.<sup>18</sup> Güssbacher drew the same conclusions on the basis of his critical analysis of Hegel's concept of intelligence.<sup>19</sup>

Two aspects of the conception of intelligence in cultural-historical psychology discussed in this article should be emphasised. First, it is a general problem of quantitative approaches that they seek to apply formal categories to developing intellectual activities manifested in a variety of forms of expression. The problem with conceptions of thinking that serve as the basis for particular theories of intelligence becomes obvious as soon as their general conceptions are analysed on the philosophical plane. Contradictions that are already present within philosophical concepts, for instance Descartes' dualism as a foundation for psychology, are present in particular psychological theories. In aiming to avoid the use of inadequate concepts, Ilyenkov's work provides methodological ideas and even examples for the formation of a reflective theory.

Second, in regard to a cultural-historical theory of intelligence, both Ilyenkov's Spinozist theory of thought and Hegel's philosophy open up possibilities for a critical analysis of recent research on and contemporary approaches to intelligence. This is true in the first place of 'common misconceptions about genetics',<sup>20</sup> including naturalistic concepts of intelligence that attribute social differences to supposed natural differences in the psychology of human individuals. Next to theories that argue for this assumption by reinforcing it with the idea of different kinds of races,<sup>21</sup> it applies also to approaches that equate intelligence with social and/or financial success. Both views, for instance, are combined in the theory of Herrnstein and Murray.<sup>22</sup> Here an analysis of the conceptual basis of their research against the background of Ilyenkov's and Vygotsky's ideas would be just as necessary as research into its social functions.

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17. See Siebert, 2003; Veggetti, 2004.

18. See Ilyenkov 1994e.

19. Güssbacher 1998, p. 350.

20. Hay 1999, p. 76.

21. See Sobich 2005 for a general criticism on the concept of races.

22. See Herrnstein and Murray 1994.





# Evald Ilyenkov, the Soviet Spinozist

Vesa Oittinen

The tricentennial of Spinoza's birth in 1977 was barely noticed in the Soviet Union,<sup>1</sup> save one exception. In Spring that year, in *Kommunist* – the theoretical and political journal of the CC of the CPSU – there appeared an article on Spinoza with the ambitious title 'Three Centuries of Immortality'.<sup>2</sup> The article was signed by I. Vasilyev and L. Naumenko. Lev Naumenko belonged to the redaction committee of *Kommunist* and was known as a philosopher who had written an original work on dialectical logic,<sup>3</sup> while 'Vasilyev' was entirely unknown. Only much later was it revealed that the name was but a pseudonym of Evald Vasilyevich Ilyenkov.<sup>4</sup>

At least to those readers of *Kommunist* who were better versed in philosophy, the identification of the man behind the pseudonym was surely not difficult, as the tricentennial article did not contain anything other than views Ilyenkov had expressed previously

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1. The latest Spinoza edition of the Soviet era was published in 1957: *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* 1–2. Newer editions are already from the post-Soviet period (for example, *Sochineniya*, 1–2). This silence of late Soviet philosophy on Spinoza stands in a noteworthy contrast to the 1920s when issues on Spinoza and Spinozism formed an important part of the debates among Marxists; in fact, one could say that the doctrine of Dialectical Materialism was to a large extent forged as a result of these Spinoza discussions. Later, V.V. Sokolov seems to have gained a quasi-monopolistic position in the field of Soviet Spinoza studies with his 1964 book *Filosofia Spinozy i sovremennost*.

2. See Vasilyev and Naumenko 1977. A little later, Ilyenkov published another popular article on Spinoza entitled 'Operedivshiy svoe vremya', in *Kuryer IuNESKO*, reprinted in Ilyenkov 1991, p. 102.

3. See Naumenko 1968.

4. The pseudonym was revealed in the 1984 bibliography of Ilyenkov's works, which was attached to the posthumous collection of his articles, and once more in the bibliography of the 1997 issue of Ilyenkov's book *Dialektika abstraktnogo i konkretnogo v nauchno-technicheskoy myshlenii*.

elsewhere – in part in his *Dialectical Logic* of 1974, and in part already in his works of the 1950s and 1960s. The main reason to write on Spinoza in *Kommunist*, an influential journal with tens of thousands copies in circulation, seems to have been pedagogical.

Spinoza was an important philosopher for Ilyenkov. One can say that Ilyenkov is one of the most prominent ‘Spinozists’ in the history of both Russian and Soviet philosophy. Already in the early stages of his career as a philosopher he had substantial impulses from Spinoza.<sup>5</sup> There exist early manuscripts from the 1950s, published only in 1991, in which Ilyenkov relies on Spinoza when seeking an appropriate form of dialectics.

Especially interesting among these early works is *Kosmologiya dukha* (Cosmology of the Spirit), with the telling subtitle ‘A Philosophico-Poetical Phantasmagory based on the Principles of Dialectical Materialism’. Here Ilyenkov stresses how dialectical materialism – he does not mean the then really-existing Diamat, but rather the one he is intending to formulate – ‘revives in a rational form the simple and profound assertion of Bruno and Spinoza, that in the matter, taken as a totality, the development is at every finite moment of time actually consummated, in it are all the stages and forms of its necessary development at the same time actually realised’.<sup>6</sup> That is, taken as a totality the matter does not develop. ‘It cannot even for a moment lose no one of its attributes, and cannot as well obtain any new attributes’.<sup>7</sup> And because the thinking is one of the attributes of matter, it follows that the thinking is as eternal as matter itself; it is ‘one of the stages in the circulation of cosmic matter’.<sup>8</sup>

This is a Spinozistic theme with intimations of Spinoza’s doctrine of attributes and the concept of *facies totius universi* (the famous picture of the Universe as a homeostasis, which as a totality remains unchanged although all its constituent parts incessantly move like pieces in a kaleidoscope).<sup>9</sup> But there is also a pessimistic note: all thinking must sooner or later perish in the great cosmic cycle, which goes through stages of ‘caloric death’ and rebirth. In a manner which is more like science-fiction than philosophy proper, Ilyenkov imagines how humanity by sacrificing itself at the peak moment of its development assists the world-matter to gain again its vigorous youth so that the cosmic circulation can begin anew.<sup>10</sup>

5. A.G. Novokhatko, ‘Fenomen Ilyenkova’ in Ilyenkov 1991, p. 13.

6. Ilyenkov 1991, p. 415.

7. Ilyenkov 1991, p. 416.

8. Ilyenkov 1991, p. 430.

9. Spinoza has explained this concept in his letter to G.H. Schuller of 29th of July, 1675: ‘...*facies totius Universi, quae quamvis infinitis modis variet, manet tamen semper eadem*’; see Spinoza 1972, vol. IV, p. 278.

10. Ilyenkov 1991, p. 431. Spinoza has, of course, not been the sole source of inspiration for Ilyenkov’s cosmological speculations; in addition, the *Dialectics of Nature* by Friedrich

According to his biographer Novokhatko,

Ilyenkov proceeds just thanks to his study of Spinoza's philosophy to an area of philosophical investigations, which has been poorly researched in the dialectical-materialistic tradition, an area which he in a condensed form characterises as the Problem of the Ideal. In 1962, his article of fundamental importance, 'The Ideal' is published in the second volume of the *Filosofskaya entsiklopediya* – without doubt, one of the most brilliant and original works in the history of the Soviet philosophy in general.<sup>11</sup>

A little later, in 1965, Ilyenkov has a series of lectures on Spinoza. In the fifth and final volume of the *Filosofskaya entsiklopediya* in 1970, he then published the article 'Substance', which by returning to Spinoza challenges the concept of matter of the established Diamat, despite Ilyenkov always having presented himself as a protagonist of the 'true Leninist dialectics'. These ideas concerning the importance of Spinoza's heritage for Marxist philosophy were then exposed once more in a systematic form in 1974 in the *Dialectical Logic*, the last book of Ilyenkov to appear in the philosopher's lifetime.

### Spinoza as guarantor for the concept of the ideal

Where lies the importance of Spinoza for a Marxist dialectics? Undoubtedly, it is just the *concept of the ideal*, the kernel of Ilyenkov's own philosophical commitment, where Spinoza's influence is strongest. At the same time, however, after taking a closer look at Ilyenkov's work it becomes clear that he is interpreting the Amsterdam philosopher in an arbitrary manner. Every philosopher is, of course, free to use the ideas of his predecessors to support his own views, but Ilyenkov's use of Spinoza as construction material for his own doctrine deserves, nevertheless, a thorough analysis.

In the *Entsiklopediya* article of 1962, the ideal is first defined in terms of Marxist philosophy as 'not an individual psychological nor physiological fact, but as a social-historical fact', which exists only 'as a form of the form (manner, shape) of *activity* of the social man'.<sup>12</sup>

But after these initial definitions Ilyenkov shifts to Spinoza who, according to Ilyenkov, had defined thinking as 'an activity of the thinking body', a body in contact with other real bodies in a real space.<sup>13</sup> On Ilyenkov's account, Spinoza

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Engels should also be mentioned in this context, and likewise the tradition of Russian cosmism.

11. Novokhatko 1991, p. 13.

12. Ilyenkov 1962, pp. 219–20.

13. Ilyenkov 1962, p. 221.

connected the 'adequate ideas', which are expressed by the words of language, with the ability, the capacity to reproduce in a real space the form – the geometrical contours – of the object of this idea, given with these words. Expressly going from this standpoint, he stated the reasons for the differentiation he made between the definition, which expresses the essence of the thing, that is, the ideal shape [*obraz*] of the object, and the nominal-formal definition, which expresses the more or less contingently snatched property of this object, its external characteristic.

According to Ilyenkov, Spinoza had explained this difference between these two kinds of definition using the example of a circle in his early work *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*:

The circle can be defined as a 'figure, where all the lines drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal'... However, such a definition '... does not at all define the essence of the circle, but only some of its properties'..., and, to cap it all, a secondary, deduced property. The things are otherwise, when the definition contains in itself 'the proximate cause of the thing'. In that case, the circle should be defined in the manner as follows: '... a figure, produced by a line, whose one end is fixed and the other end moves'... This latter definition gives the manner how the thing is constructed in real space. There the nominal definition is brought forth together with the real activity of the thinking body in accordance with the real spatial contour of the object of the idea. In this case man has the adequate idea, that is, the ideal shape [*obraz*] of the thing, and not only signs, characteristics which are expressed in words...<sup>14</sup>

I have cited the passage *in extenso*, because it contains the core of the Ilyenkovian interpretation of Spinoza, which is remarkably original; I do not know of any other interpretations quite like it within the expansive range of literature on Spinoza.

In the late 1974 work of Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, one chapter (Essay 2) is dedicated to Spinoza. The treatment of Spinoza's concept of the idea remains almost completely unaltered – in fact, Ilyenkov cites the same passages from Spinoza – but now he adds some important new elements to his interpretation. He stresses the significance of Spinoza's legacy for dialectical thought: 'Like Leibniz, Spinoza rose high above the mechanistic limitations of the natural science of his time. Any tendency directly to universalise partial forms and methods of thinking only useful within the bounds of mechanistic, mathematical natural science was also foreign to him'.<sup>15</sup> True, Spinoza's main work, the *Ethics*, is

14. Ilyenkov 1962, p. 222.

15. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 27 [p. 26]. From now on the page numbers of the Russian edition are given in square brackets.

decked out in the solid armour of the constructions of formal logic and deductive mathematics that constitute the 'shell' of Spinoza's system, its (so to say) defensive coat of mail. In other words, the real logic of Spinoza's thinking by no means coincides with the formal logic of the movement of his 'axioms', 'theorems', 'scholia', and their proofs.<sup>16</sup>

On the one side, Ilyenkov stresses the methodological value of Spinoza's monism, which means a change for the better compared with the dualism of two substances in Descartes:

There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation, body and thought, but only one single object, which is the thinking body of living, real man (or other analogous being, if such exists anywhere in the Universe), only considered from two different and even opposing aspects or points of view ... It is not a special 'soul', installed by God in the human body as in a temporary residence, that thinks, but the body of man itself. Thought is a property, a mode of existence, of the body.<sup>17</sup>

The Cartesians had incorrectly posed the whole question of the psycho-physical problem: they desperately sought to establish some kind of causal relation between thought and extension, although such a relation simply does not exist. Thought and extension are simply two sides of one and the same matter. So Spinoza cut the 'Gordian knot' of the psycho-physical problem, 'the mystic insolubility of which still torments the mass of theoreticians', by a simple turn of thought.<sup>18</sup>

## The cultural-historical school of Soviet psychology

On the other side, thanks to his monistic approach Spinoza becomes an important forerunner of the Leontyev school of Soviet psychology, the so-called 'cultural-historical school'. In the 1970s Ilyenkov tried to establish himself as the 'court philosopher' of Soviet psychologists. He followed with keen interest the experiments with deaf-mute children carried out by the psychologist A.S. Meshcheryakov, interpreting the often spectacular results of the therapy as confirmation of his own theory of the ideal as a form of human activity. In fact, Ilyenkov's influence on the methodological discourses of Soviet psychology remains an unanswered question, although his influence may have been quite remarkable – for example, the educational psychologist Vasily Davydov

16. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 29 [p. 27].

17. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 31 [p. 29].

18. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 33 [p. 30].

explicitly relied on him.<sup>19</sup> However, the so-called 'activity approach' (*deyatelnostnyi podkhod*), which stresses the role of activity in the development of the psyche and constitutes the *idée-maîtresse* of the cultural-historical school, was already sketched out by Leontyev in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, the priority of the idea seems to belong to him, and not to Ilyenkov – although the latter has lifted the activity paradigm out of the specific context of methodology of psychology, and developed it into a general philosophical doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

The main idea behind Leontyev's theory of activity was that 'the psychic ... is seen as the result of the process of assimilation of the social-historical production ... This process consists of an activity focusing on the products to be assimilated, an activity which responds adequately to the activity which in turn is embodied in those objects and with which the human psyche has become objectivated'.<sup>21</sup> In sum, Leontyev's 'activity approach' is an application of the Marxist concept of practice in the field of psychology.

At this point, Spinoza returns to the scene. The (allegedly) Spinozistic idea of the real definition of the circle involving the constructive activity in geometric space, which Ilyenkov presented already in his 1962 article for the *Filosofskaya entsiklopediya*, is now put forth as foreshadowing the fundamental idea of the theory of cognition behind the *deyatelnostnyi podkhod* of the psychologists. In the *Dialectical Logic* of 1974, Ilyenkov expands the geometrical example found in Spinoza's *Tractatus* to embrace all fields of human activity. For Spinoza, argued Ilyenkov, '[t]hinking is not the *product* of an action, but the *action itself* ... just as walking, for example, is the mode of the action of the legs'.<sup>22</sup>

However, a general appeal to the principle of action does not yet suffice, because all bodies must, according to Spinoza, be active at least in some degree, because total inactivity (that is, *passio*) equates to the destruction of the body. Thus, Ilyenkov has to demonstrate of what exactly the specific traits of human activity consist. He formulates his Spinozistic 'discovery' as follows:

Man, however, *the thinking body*, builds his movement on the shape of any other body. He does not wait until the insurmountable resistance of other bodies forces him to turn off from his path; the thinking body goes freely round any obstacle of the most complicated form. *The capacity of a thinking body to mould its own action actively to the shape of any other body*, ... Spinoza considered to

19. See Kozulin 1984, p. 146 sqq.

20. On Ilyenkov and Leontyev as 'activity theorists', see Friedrich 1993. According to Friedrich, Ilyenkov explicates the philosophical background of the psychology of Leontyev.

21. Budilowa 1975, p. 225.

22. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 35 [p. 31].

be its distinguishing sign and the specific feature of that activity that we call 'thinking' or 'reason'.<sup>23</sup>

In a like manner, Ilyenkov interprets Spinoza's theory of truth as a version of activity theory. The activity forms the basis of the process of cognition, as is the case in Leontyev's psychology. Even when man errs he is active in a way, which strictly corresponds to the form of the external thing. But in this case the question concerns

what the thing was. If it were 'trivial', 'imperfect' in itself, i.e. fortuitous, the mode of action adapted to it would also be imperfect. And if a person transferred this mode of action to another thing, he would slip up. Error, consequently, only began when a mode of action that was limitedly true was given universal significance, when the relative was taken for absolute.<sup>24</sup>

The Spinozistic concept of the *idea adaequata* is to be interpreted just from this viewpoint of the activity approach:

The activity of the thinking body was in direct proportion to the adequateness of its ideas. The more passive the person, the greater was the power of the nearest, purely external circumstances over him, and the more his mode of action was determined by the chance form of things.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, Ilyenkov defines the adequate idea as 'only the conscious state [*osoznannoe sostoyanie*] of our body *identical in form with the thing outside the body*'.<sup>26</sup> If man could conform his actions with the infinite aggregate of things in interaction and all their combinations, his thinking would achieve the maximum of perfection, that is, it 'would be identical with thought as the attribute of substance'.<sup>27</sup>

In the subsequent chapters of the *Dialectical Logic* Ilyenkov reviews Marx's analyses of human labour activity in the production process. Marxism adds to the activity paradigm an important dimension, namely the social character of human life, and thus even the ideality must be seen in this light. To the concept of the ideal as a 'form of things, but existing outside things'<sup>28</sup> must be added the social dimension, which is not yet clearly present in Spinoza. Thus, the ideal is

23. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 47 [pp. 38–9]. In the original, the first sentence of the citation reads: 'Chelovek – myshlyashchee telo – stroit svoe dvizhenie po forme liubogo drugogo tela'.

24. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 58 [pp. 44–5].

25. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 58 [p. 45].

26. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 69 [p. 51].

27. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 59 [p. 45].

28. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 260 [the locus does not appear in the second Russian edition].



‘[i]n itself . . . the socially determined form of man’s life activity corresponding to the form of its object and product’, and to try to explain the ideal from the physiological properties of the brain is as unfruitful as to try to explain the money form of the product of labour from the physico-chemical features of gold.<sup>29</sup>

But while Spinoza lacked the social dimension present in Marxism, he was, however, a materialist who ‘understood . . . beautifully’<sup>30</sup> the character of the ideal and how the ideal is created by human activity:

With good reason he linked adequate ideas, expressed in the words of a language, precisely with the ability to reproduce given verbal forms in real space. It was just there that he drew the distinction between a determination expressing the essence of the matter, i.e. the ideal image of the object, and nominal, formal definitions that fixed a more or less accidentally chosen property of the object.<sup>31</sup>

We have come back to the geometrical example of the 1962 *Entsiklopediya* essay. And, in fact, in the subsequent pages of the *Dialectical Logic* Ilyenkov reproduces (almost without amendments) the text of his earlier essay.

Although Ilyenkov stresses how Spinoza had played an ‘immense role in the development of logic . . . , a role far from fully appreciated’,<sup>32</sup> he has, only a little more to say about the dialectics of Spinoza than what has already been discussed. It can be said that Ilyenkov’s reception of Spinoza is highly selective. As a matter of fact, he takes from the Dutch philosopher only two moments: the idea of monism and the concept of activity (the concept of an ‘active body’).

Ilyenkov’s interpretation of Spinoza is most original just here, in the attempt to fashion out of Spinoza a precursor to the ideas of the cultural-historical school of psychology, and, through this, of the Marxist concept of practice in general. True, this ‘Spinozistic link’ had already been tried in the formative phase of Soviet psychology. In the mid-1930s, Lev Vygotsky wrote an extensive study on the methodological problems of psychology, which, however, remained unfulfilled and was not published until a six-volume edition of his collected works appeared in 1984. The manuscript was known among his disciples as the ‘Spinoza book’, and as copies of it circulated, I think we can be sure that Ilyenkov knew or at least knew of it. But Vygotsky’s main concern here was the methodological problem of body-mind dualism, which according to him was of Cartesian provenance and had to be overcome. Thus, Spinoza’s monism proved helpful in working out a new kind of psychological science in the USSR. This concern for a monistic

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29. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 261 [p. 170].

30. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 263 [p. 172].

31. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 263 [p. 172].

32. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 27 [p. 26].

viewpoint is shared by both Vygotsky and Ilyenkov. However, Vygotsky did not stress in his manuscript Spinoza's ideas of the activity of the subject in the same manner as Ilyenkov or Leontyev.<sup>33</sup>

### 'Spinozistic' Marxism or philosophy of identity?

At first sight, Ilyenkov's Spinoza interpretation seems rather convincing. In fact, is it not absolutely pertinent to link the Marxist concept of practice (on which the activity theory relies) with the old tradition of *actio* and *passio* with its Aristotelian roots? This is a tradition revived in the seventeenth-century by Descartes and Spinoza. In the beginning of the third part of the *Ethics* Spinoza writes:

I say that we are acting [*Nos tum agere dico*], when anything takes place, either within us or externally to us, whereof we are the adequate cause; that is... when through our nature something takes place within us or externally to us, which can through our nature alone be clearly and distinctly understood. On the other hand, I say that we are passive [*pati*] as regards something when that something takes place within us..., we being only the partial cause.<sup>34</sup>

When Spinoza then goes to develop his doctrine of human activity, he indeed is using expressions which seem to come very close to the 'activity approach' of Leontyev and Ilyenkov: '[I]n proportion as any given body is more fitted than others for doing many actions or receiving more impressions at once (*aptius est ad plura simul agendum, vel patiendum*), so also is the mind, of which it is the object, more fitted than others for forming many simultaneous perceptions';<sup>35</sup> 'The human mind is capable of perceiving a great number of things, and is so in proportion as its body is capable of receiving a great number of impressions';<sup>36</sup> '[W]e only act, in so far as we understand' (*nos eatenus tantummodo agimus, quatenus intelligimus*).<sup>37</sup>

But by a more accurate inspection these resemblances soon reveal their superficiality. The differences between Ilyenkov and Spinoza can be discerned both

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33. It can be disputed, whether the Leontyev school should be seen as representing the whole totality of Vygotsky's ideas; indeed, Vygotsky's late work on the interconnections of thought and language seem to indicate that he had begun to search for new trails, leaving the Marxist-inspired 'activity' paradigm behind – but this question need not concern us here. On Vygotsky and Leontyev, see Friedrich 1991.

34. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III. Def. 2.

35. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II. Prop. 13 schol.

36. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II. Prop. 14.

37. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV. Prop. 24 dem.

in their respective concepts of the ideal, and in their versions of philosophical monism.

a) *Spinozistic vs. Ilyenkovian concept of the ideal*

Above all, it is futile to try to find in Spinoza a definition of thought which would correspond to that of Ilyenkov, namely as the ability of the body to move according to the form of another body. In fact, such a definition would have contradicted the whole spirit of Spinoza's philosophy, which emphasises just the strict parallelism of the attributes of Thought and Extension and their radical difference.<sup>38</sup> There cannot be any causal relation between ideas as forms of thought and the external forms of things, and Spinoza says this so clearly that there is no room for any misinterpretations: 'Body cannot determine mind to think. Neither can mind determine body to motion or rest or any state different from these'. This is not possible for the simple reason that the modes of thought have God as their cause insofar he is a thinking thing; '[t]hat, therefore, which determines the mind to thought is a mode of thought and not a mode of extension'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, ideas in the human mind are generated, according to Spinoza, by God's attribute of Thought and not by the impressions caused by the forms of external things. Thus, the reproduction of the contours of some external thing by a 'thinking body' cannot cause in the latter any idea of that external thing, be it an adequate idea or not.

The point is that, according to Spinoza, the ideas as modes of thought are immaterial, that is, totally non-corporeal,<sup>40</sup> and thus it would be absurd to assert that the ideas should in some way 'reproduce' the corporeal forms of external bodies. Quite the contrary: the essence of the idea is that it is a *Mentis conceptus*, which Spinoza explains as follows:

I...warn my readers to make an accurate distinction between an idea, or conception of the mind, and the images of things which we imagine [*Lector-esque moneo, ut accurate distinguant inter ideam, sive Mentis conceptum, & inter imagines rerum, quas imaginamur*]... Those who think that ideas consist in images which are formed in us by contact with external bodies... regard ideas as though they were inanimate pictures on a panel, and, filled with this misconception, do not see that an idea, inasmuch it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation.<sup>41</sup>

38. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II. Prop. 7 et sqq.

39. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III. Prop. 2 dem.

40. Spinoza uses Descartes's concepts of Thought and Extension: they are reciprocally defined as negations of each other. The Thought is non-extensional, the Extension is not Thought.

41. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II. Prop. 49 schol.

Ideas on the one side, and pictures formed in the imagination on the other, are thus entirely different – which is not grasped by those who mingle the imagination with the intellect. The strict way Spinoza separates the ideas from the corporeal imagination resembles, in fact, very much the manner in which Kant later distinguished the intellectual and sensual abilities of the mind, to the degree that he spoke about the ‘two stems of human knowledge’ which cannot be reduced to one another. For Spinoza too, the imagination is but a kind of *phantasia corporea*, that is, consisting of pictures *in parte aliqua cerebri depictae*, and it is the sole source of inadequacy of our knowledge.

Thus, when Ilyenkov connects the ideality with the ability of the ‘thinking body’ to reproduce the contours of external things, he tacitly equates the idea with the products of imagination. In doing this he clearly sins against one of the main principles of Spinoza’s doctrine. It seems that this subreptive slip from pure thought to the material pictures of imagination is explained by Ilyenkov’s overall tendency towards a ‘philosophy of identity’: if Spirit and Matter are to be reconciled in the Hegelian manner, then the immateriality of the ideal must, of course, be sublated.

#### b) *Spinozistic vs. Ilyenkovian monism*

In a similar way, it can be said that Ilyenkov’s concept of monism differs from that of Spinoza by accentuating the identity of thought and matter. Spinoza’s monism was a substance monism: Thought and Extension are, for him, not two different substances as in Descartes, but only attributes of one and the same substance. By this move Spinoza could eliminate the real distinction between thought and extension, which was the rock of offence in Cartesianism. But this does not mean that thought and extension become identical in Spinoza’s system. On the contrary, even the attributes must be conceived through themselves,<sup>42</sup> and although there is a strict parallelism between them, there are no causal relations between modes of thought and modes of extension. As already stated above, the thought cannot determine the body to anything, nor *vice versa*.

Accordingly, the Ilyenkovian expression ‘the thinking body’ (*myshlyashchee telo*) is not Spinozistic. In fact, it does not occur at all in Spinoza, although

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42. Spinoza, *Ethics*, I. Prop. 10. The proposition states: *Unumquodque unius substantiae attributum per se concipi debet*. In the scholium Spinoza states that as the attributes ‘express the reality or being of the substance’ and ‘none could be produced by any other’, they must be conceived in the same manner as the substance, and every one of them is independent of others. Actually, as the attribute is ‘that, what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of the substance’, so the attribute must, of course, reproduce the fundamental property of the substance, namely that it is in itself and is conceived by itself.

Ilyenkov's use of it in connection with his analysis of Spinoza's texts suggests otherwise.<sup>43</sup> For Spinoza, man of course consists of mind and body, and the mind is *idea corporis* – but the human mind is constituted as a part of the infinite intellect of God, which means that when man is thinking or having ideas, God himself is having that thought or idea 'through the nature of human mind'. In other words, the origin of thinking is not, according to Spinoza, to be explained by the 'thinking body' of a certain human individual, but by God insofar as he is a *res cogitans*. Ilyenkov's theory of the 'thinking body' completely ignores this parallelism of Spinoza of *ordo et connexio idearum* and *ordo et connexio rerum*.<sup>44</sup> Instead of a unified 'thinking body' as in Ilyenkov, there is in Spinoza a dualism or rather a parallelism: on the one side, *determinatio corporis*, on the other, *decretum mentis*, and they do not meet but in the substance which guarantees their unity.<sup>45</sup>

These differences in the monism conception of Ilyenkov and Spinoza are important. Even in this case it becomes apparent that Ilyenkov is reading Spinoza as a philosopher of identity, as a thinker foreshadowing Hegel. Where Spinoza 'sublated' the Cartesian dualism, so in a like manner Hegel 'sublates' Kant's dualism. It seems that these dualisms can be removed if it is possible to find some mediating instance between the two extremities. In Spinoza this *tertium datur*, which unites thought and matter was the Substance, in Hegel it was the Spirit, and for Ilyenkov it is the concept of activity. He writes, for example, that '[t]hinking is not the *product* of action [of the body], but the *action itself*',<sup>46</sup> which amounts to the claim that the action of the body is, considered in itself, apart from its bodily substrate, nothing but thought.<sup>47</sup> Bodily movements thus generate thought, and the action is the mediating link between thought and body, rising above their dualism. This reading does not find support in Spinoza, for whom the *corporis actio* and *mentis actio* were parallel yet clearly different forms of action which did not exert any influence upon one another in the modal world.

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43. Among the present-day Russian philosophers, Andrey Maidansky has especially stressed this fact. His statement, although quite correct, has strangely enough been met with hostility from the side of some Russian 'Ilyenkovians'. See, for example, Naumenko 2012.

44. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II. Prop. 7.

45. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III. Prop. 2 schol. ad fin.

46. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 35 [p. 31].

47. Here Ilyenkov in fact seems to me to be guilty of crossing into a different genus (the well-known logical error described by Aristotle as *metábasis eis állo génos*). In the midst of the process of reasoning, bodily movement suddenly becomes movement in thought!

## On the construction of geometrical figures

The differences between Ilyenkov and Spinoza can be further elucidated if we analyse the example of geometrical construction he gave as early as 1962 in his encyclopedic entry and repeated in the *Dialectical Logic*. I have already cited the relevant passage above. There Ilyenkov pointed to the differentiation Spinoza made between the definition of the essence of a thing, and the nominal-formal definition. The essence of the circle is grasped by a genetic definition, which gives the 'proximate cause' of the definiendum. Such would be the definition of the circle as 'the figure described by any line whereof one end is fixed and the other free'.<sup>48</sup>

The latter definition gives the way of construction of the thing in real space, asserts Ilyenkov:

Here the *nominal definition* arose *together* with the *real action of the thinking body along the spatial contour of the object of the idea*. In that case man also possessed an adequate idea, i.e. an ideal image, of the thing, and not just signs expressed in words. That is also a materialist conception of the nature of the ideal. The ideal exists there where there is a capacity to recreate the object in space.<sup>49</sup>

At first glance Ilyenkov seems to have found an ingenious example to illustrate his theory of the ideal. Moreover, here Ilyenkov is not only attempting to create a bridge between Spinoza's and Marx's respective epistemologies. He seems (implicitly) to be trying to connect the Marxist theory of cognition with a further illustrious tradition of philosophical thought, namely the so-called *verum factum* tradition, which says that we can cognise adequately only what we have ourselves constructed (in our understanding or by our hands). This train of thought, rooted already in antiquity, has its chief modern protagonist in Giambattista Vico,<sup>50</sup> but already Thomas Hobbes had formulated the same principle. Actually, as Ernst Cassirer has shown, Spinoza has taken his geometrical examples directly from Hobbes's critique of Wallis (his *Examinatio* was published in 1660–61, and Spinoza wrote the *Tractatus* shortly thereafter).<sup>51</sup>

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48. 'Ex. gr. circulus... sic esset definiendus: eum esse figuram, quae describitur a linea quacunque, cujus alia extremitas est fixa, alia mobilis, quae definitio clare comprehendit causam proximam'; Spinoza 1972.

49. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 264 [p. 172].

50. For a recent exposition of Vico's doctrine, see Maurizio Martirano 2007, *Vero-Fatto*, Napoli: Guida. Marx mentions Vico once in a footnote to *Capital*, and the *verum factum* theme has played a certain role in the discussions of Italian Marxists, especially around Rodolfo Mondolfo's Marx interpretations. It is not possible here to go into this in more detail. See Martirano 2007, p. 123.

51. Cassirer 1994, p. 99; cf. p. 49 sqq.

We can thus say that there is nothing especially ‘Spinozistic’ in the geometric example from the *Tractatus* which Ilyenkov cites. On the contrary, the genetic definition of the circle defended by both Hobbes and Spinoza was, as Karl Schuhmann states in his study on the methodology of these two philosophical contemporaries, ‘widespread already in the Antiquity, and its *locus classicus* – like of all genetic and non-genetic definitions of Euclidean elementary geometry – is to be found in the *Definitions* of Hero of Alexandria’.<sup>52</sup>

A thorough going trait in the whole *verum factum* tradition, especially as it comes to its application to geometry, is that the figures are produced in the medium of the imagination. Already among the antique authors Proclus named this indispensable medium, in his commentary to Euclid, ‘the intelligible matter’ (*hê noêtê hylê*). According to him, it was a matter in which the thought construes geometrical figures by an ‘imaginative movement’ (*fantastikê kinêsis*) of the point. The geometer has the figures he constructs as if in front of his ‘eyes of the mind’. The imagination thus mediates between thought and matter in a manner not unlike the schematism found in Kant’s later work.<sup>53</sup> In this respect there is, indeed, a continuity in the *verum factum* tradition from Proclus to Spinoza. Both assert that the geometrical figures are produced in and by the imagination. Spinoza stresses this very explicitly in another geometrical example of his *Tractatus* (which Ilyenkov does not cite). Here it is the construction of the sphere which is under consideration. Having first remarked that ‘the reality (*forma*) of a true thought must be sought in the thought itself’, Spinoza will explain this by investigating a true idea ‘whose object we know for certain to be dependent on our power of thinking, and to have nothing corresponding to it in nature’. The geometrical sphere is just such an object. So, ‘in order to form the conception of a sphere, I invent a cause at my pleasure – namely, a semicircle revolving round its centre, and thus producing a sphere. This is indisputably a true idea; and, although we know that no sphere in nature has ever been actually so formed, the perception remains true’.<sup>54</sup>

Spinoza calls this conception of sphere a ‘*vera perceptio*’, that is, something like an image. As such the image of a rotating semicircle is false, but ‘when it is associated with the concept of a sphere, or of some cause determining such a

52. Schuhmann 1987, p. 72.

53. The task of the geometrical imagination in Proclus and Spinoza, and schematism in Kant, is the same: to find a mediating instance in two totally different principles. Kant expressed the task thus: ‘In our case there must be some third thing homogeneous on the one side with the category, and on the other with the phenomenon, to render the application of the former to the latter possible. This intermediate representation must be pure (free from all that is empirical) and yet intelligible on the one side, and sensuous on the other’, and then concludes: ‘Such a representation is the *transcendental schema*’; Kant 1998, B 177.

54. Spinoza 1972, p. 37.

motion', that is, with an adequate idea (which is not an image at all!), it becomes true. In other words, Spinoza admits here, the images formed by the senses can 'assist' the thought – they are, as he elsewhere in the *Tractatus* writes, *auxilia intellectus* (aids of the intellect). Why does the intellect need the assistance of imagination in producing fictitious geometrical figures? The answer is simple: 'The figures are definite and discernible from each other only in the imagination, because only in imagination the extension is given as finite and divisible ... In pure thought, on the other hand, the geometrical relations have no parts nor distances'.<sup>55</sup> Even Spinoza pointed to this, when he remarked, in the corollarium and scholium to *Ethics* II. prop. 8, how the geometrical figures exist eternally as 'contained' in the infinite idea of God, but receive their concrete geometrical properties only when they step into existence and thus from eternity into duration.

Thus, the geometrical ideas (which, as ideas, are immaterial and have no extension), must become objectivated in a medium. The idea of a circle in the mind has no spatial properties; it must first receive a perspicuous expression in space, before it is possible to make geometrical operations with it. But, at the same time, one should not forget that the imagination plays here a passive role only: it provides the matter for the 'eyes of the mind', but the actual construction of figures is done by the intellect, which is the sole active principle.

Now it is easy to see in which respect this point of view of the old *verum factum* philosophers of geometry differs from the *deyatelnostnyi podkhod* of Ilyenkov and the Leontyev school. While Spinoza (and even Proclus) thought that the idea (in our example, the idea of the circle or of the sphere) differs so much from material objects, that its application requires a special mediating instance, the imagination, there is in Ilyenkov no third instance between thought and matter. As a consequence, the mediatory role shifts to thought itself. In order to be able to reproduce the 'spacial contours' of the external objects, thought itself must have something in common with these objects. Because the thinking must do even the job of the imagination, ideality cannot in Ilyenkov be purely immaterial. In other words, an Ilyenkovian 'idea' is not the same as Spinoza's *Mentis conceptus*, but is encumbered with that of which Spinoza warned his readers, namely the misconception that the idea is a kind of picture.

This confusion as to the role of the third instance in Ilyenkov's interpretation of Spinoza becomes especially palpable when he describes his view of the adequate idea:

When I describe a circle with my hand on a piece of paper (in real space), my body, according to Spinoza, comes into a state fully identical with the form of

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55. Schuhmann 1987, p. 70.



the circle outside my body, into a state of real action in the form of a circle. My body (my hand) really describes a circle, and the awareness of this state... is also the idea, which is, moreover, 'adequate'.<sup>56</sup>

This passage seems to describe Spinoza's point quite well. After all, had Spinoza not himself stressed in the famous proposition 7 of the second part of *Ethics*, in which he establishes the parallelism between modes of thought and modes of extension, that according to this principle 'a circle existing in nature, and the idea of a circle existing... are one and the same thing'? Ilyenkov seems to refer exactly to this formulation of Spinoza. The misinterpretation, however, consists in the fact that Ilyenkov does not note that this *idea circuli existentis* is the idea of one single circle existing in nature. It is not the idea of the essence of the circle. The essences of the modes are independent of their existence,<sup>57</sup> and we can thus have an idea of the circle's essence even where there would exist no circles in nature. To make the circle perspicuous we need not revert to real circles in nature, but we can construct it in our imagination *ad libitum causam*, as Spinoza stressed in the *Tractatus*. The adequate idea of the circle expresses its essence and therefore does not arise from the correspondence of my bodily action with the form of a singular, concrete external circle in nature, as Ilyenkov interprets, but from the fact that I can freely construct it in my imagination.

Even here, Spinoza differentiates strictly between thought and matter: the geometrical figures constructed in the imagination are in the last instance nothing but expressions of the non-spatial products of our minds, that is, of the ideas. The intellect uses the imagination only as a medium in order to describe something which ultimately is non-material. In Ilyenkov's conception, this medium drops away, and consequently the thought must cope immediately with the matter and becomes thus burdened with it.

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56. Ilyenkov 1977 [1974], p. 69 [p. 51].

57. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, I. Prop. 24.

Part Three

**Commentaries**



# Reality of the Ideal

Andrey Maidansky

Marxism started with a revolt against its nurse – Hegel's philosophy. In 1845 in Brussels, as Marx remembered, he and Engels decided to 'settle accounts with our erst-while philosophical conscience (*Gewissen*)'.<sup>1</sup> The radical error of Hegelianism consists in the belief that ideas rule over the world, and the whole history of mankind is some 'other-being' of pure ideas. So Marx and Engels intended to turn philosophy upside down – to drive away philosophy, with its 'drunken speculation', from the 'science of history' (*Wissenschaft der Geschichte*), and to depict reality as it is, materialistically.

The subject of philosophy had been narrowed down to the 'realm of pure thoughts'. *Das Reich des reinen Gedankens* is the only thing that falls to the share of philosophy after the expulsion of it from nature and history by 'positive sciences', Engels declares.<sup>2</sup> To study the laws of the thought process – formal logic and the dialectical method – is all that philosophers could do with profit to the cause. All the other 'philosophical chattels' became useless for a scientific understanding of reality.

Very soon after, however, Georgy Plekhanov and his pupils resurrected philosophy as a science about all and everything: 'the general synthetic view on nature and life'.<sup>3</sup> Later, the drawing of a philosophical picture of the world, à la Comte or Eugen Dühring, becomes the favourite business of Soviet Diamat.

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1. Marx 1961b, p. 10.

2. See Engels 1962, p. 306.

3. Plekhanov 1928, p. 324. 'Philosophy is a *synthesis* of cognised being of the given epoch'; Plekhanov 1928, p. 325.

Young Evald Ilyenkov attempted to return Marxist philosophy to its roots, having restricted its subject to the sphere of 'pure thought'. Theses on the subject of philosophy, written by Ilyenkov and Valentin Korovikov, caused a juicy scandal at Moscow University, after which both philosophers were removed from teaching philosophy. For all that, Ilyenkov remained constant in understanding philosophy as the science of ideas, the 'dialectics of the ideal'.

## I

It is generally believed that ideas can exist only in the head, in the mind, and not in reality. In ordinary language the word 'ideal' turned into a synonym of 'mental', in contrast to the 'real' as tangible, sensuously perceptible reality. Meanwhile, having examined the contents of the human mind, Plato discovered two different kinds of phenomena: alongside the sensual images of things, which are leaky like a pot with holes, or a runny nose,<sup>4</sup> there is something persistent and universal. Ilyenkov interprets Plato's *eidê* as:

the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity.<sup>5</sup>

Mathematical truths and logical categories, moral imperatives and laws of state, artistic styles and the grammatical order of language – all these phenomena are strictly ideal. They form a peculiar world into which human beings are plunged head over heels since the moment of their birth. It is the world of *social relations*, embodied in various objective forms, from children's toys to temples and pyramids. The very person, the thinking subject or 'self' is ideal. In its essence it is, as Marx notes, an 'ensemble of social relations',<sup>6</sup> represented in an individual natural body and psyche.

Ilyenkov, following Marx, looks for clues to the nature of the ideal in the structure of social relations. His *Dialectics of the Ideal* openly aligns itself with Marx's *Capital*, especially with the analysis of the value-form in the process of commodity exchange given in the first chapter. In Ilyenkov's opinion, the value-form is 'a typical and characteristic case of ideality in general'.<sup>7</sup>

A commodity can express its value in no other way than in the corporeal 'mirror' of another commodity.<sup>8</sup> This reflective expression of value is called in Marx

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4. See Plato's 'Cratylus'; Plato 1903, 440cd.

5. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 11.

6. 'Das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse'; Marx 1961a, p. 6.

7. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 46.

8. 'Jeder andre Warenkörper wird zum Spiegel des Leinwandwerts'; Marx 1962, p. 77.

the ‘ideal or represented form’ – in contrast to the ‘sensuously perceived real corporeal form’ of commodities.<sup>9</sup>

In the canonical Russian edition of *Capital*, the expression *vorgestellte Form* is translated as ‘form, existing only in notion (*forma, sushchestvujushchaja lish’ v predstavlenii*)’. The translator, I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, clearly regarded the ideal as a purely subjective, imaginary phenomenon. In the next sentence Marx writes that the relation of commodities to gold (the money form, price), ‘exists only in their heads’ (*in ihren Köpfen spukt*), so to speak. Notice that this is said about the ‘heads’ of *things* – the very commodities, and not of their owners, men.

Correcting the ‘unfortunate inadequacy’ of translation, Ilyenkov specifies that we face an economical and not psychological phenomenon. Marx writes about the very real relationship between commodities, and not the subjective perception of their values by the human head. Commodity exchange, of course, cannot happen without the participation of the human head. However,

value is *represented* not in the head, but in gold... The available translation effaces, actually, the *objective dialectics* that Marx reveals in the relation between value and its money expression, i.e. price. The German word *vorgestellte* figures here not in its subjectively-psychological meaning, but in that meaning which is associated, both in Russian and German languages, with the word *representative, representation*.<sup>10</sup>

Other examples of the objective ideal representation are given in *Dialectics of the Ideal*. In this way a diplomat represents his own country, a word symbolically represents a thing, and ballerinas in white vestures represent little swans. All these are representations of the real world in forms of people’s collective and social consciousness. But it would be a mistake to think that the ideal as such is a form of social consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Quite the opposite: social consciousness is a form of being of the ideal. It is the highest form of ideal reality, the ideal as it is, *in puris naturalibus*.

The ideal, by its nature, is infinite and eternal (‘Plato’s theorem’), and therefore it cannot be an attribute of a finite creature – neither a particular person, nor the whole of humankind. For Ilyenkov, the ideal is an attribute of the very Nature, or Matter, like Spinoza’s *Cogitatio* – Thought with a capital T.

9. ‘Der Preis oder die Geldform der Waren ist, wie ihre Wertform überhaupt, eine von ihrer handgreiflich reellen Körperform unterschiedne, also nur ideelle oder vorgestellte Form’; Marx 1962, p. 110.

10. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 195.

11. Ilyenkov was interpreted in such a way by his elder friend Mikhail Lifshits. See Lifshits 1984, p. 123.

Matter is constantly possessed of thought, it is constantly thinking of itself...  
As there is no thought without matter, considered to be substance, as also no  
matter without thought, considered to be its attribute.<sup>12</sup>

Man himself, with all his deeds and thoughts, the whole history of human society is a moment and fragment of the eternal being of Nature, 'one of the necessary links, closing the universal circle of the world's matter'.<sup>13</sup>

Ilyenkov demonstrated this statement in his very first work, *Cosmology of Mind*. He sees the mission of thinking beings in resisting entropy. Sacrificing themselves, they have to return the freezing cosmos to its initial fire-like state. The death of the 'thinking mind' becomes a creative act as the birth of the new Universe and of some new other intelligent life in it. The term 'ideal' does not feature in *Cosmology*, and it plays no important role in Ilyenkov's first book *The Dialectics of Abstract and Concrete in Marx's 'Capital'*. Only at the beginning of the 1960s does the philosopher come closer to creating his conception of the ideal. Still, during Ilyenkov's lifetime a geographer Igor Zabelin recalled:

In the course of private conversations I managed to persuade my friend philosopher E.V. Ilyenkov to undertake a broad world-viewing elaboration of the problem of the ideal. He performed this task with depth and originality peculiar to him. As a result, for the first time in Soviet literature, a big article *The Ideal* appeared in the second volume of *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* (1962), having put an end to the 'encyclopaedic conspiracy of silence' in this field.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, until this moment the category of the ideal remained practically unexplored in Marxist philosophy, though it may be met in every manual of Diamat – already in the first chapter, narrating the great battle between materialism and idealism. Defining the nature of the ideal, Diamatians contented themselves with the ritual of quoting the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*:

The ideal is nothing else than the material, transplanted into the human head and translated there.<sup>15</sup>

The definition, speaking frankly, is not all that profound. It might easily have been formulated by some sensualist like La Mettrie or Cabanis. In this formula there is not a trace of the specifically Marxist historicism or the 'practical materialism' along the lines of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Metaphors 'transplanted' and 'translated' do not promote clarity.

12. Ilyenkov 1991, pp. 415–16.

13. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 419.

14. Zabelin 1970, p. 223.

15. '... Das Ideelle nichts anderes als das im Menschenkopf umgesetzte und übersetzte Materielle'; Marx 1962, p. 27.

Commenting on this definition, Ilyenkov states that one should not interpret the 'human head' naturalistically, and that Marx's definition of the ideal 'loses its concrete meaning' outside the context of his polemic against Hegel.<sup>16</sup> Ilyenkov well understood that the verbatim reading of Marx's definition of the ideal plays into the hands of the 'naturalists' of Pavlov's school and adjoins to them Diamatians. Once, conversing with friends, Ilyenkov projected this definition onto one of the ideal phenomena: 'Love is a sexual appetite, transplanted into the human head and translated there'. The joke was appreciated and became popular.

A good definition, as Ilyenkov used to say referring to Spinoza, must express the efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) of the thing defined. But the 'human head' can hardly be the cause of the ideal, no matter how one interprets that head – either in the naturalistic or in the cultural-historical sense. The concrete Marxist definition of the ideal must 'conceive the act of birth of the ideal from the process of man's objective-practical activity'.<sup>17</sup> The head is not a subject, but merely a servant and tool in this process of 'transplanting of the material'. The real subject is *human labour*. All things, having been involved by man into the circle of his labour activity, receive a 'seal of ideality' (Ilyenkov's expression). With this seal of ideality the concealed essence of things, the causes and laws of their being, are revealed.

In order for the expression of essence of a thing to be ideally pure, the natural body of some *other* thing must become the material for this expression. The thing commends its 'soul' to another thing, and the latter appears as a *symbol*. The ideal is the very material, only inverted by its essence.

The ideal does not admix anything to the essence of things; that is why it is so easy to take up the ideal for this very essence (idealism). The absolute 'transparency' of expressing the nature (efficient causes) of things is a characteristic form of thought. It is certainly not allowed to include in the category of the ideal just any subjective perceptions, conceiving only external features of things or the 'fleeting mental states of an individual, completely personal, not possessing any universal meaning for another individual', as Ilyenkov insists. In classical philosophy, since Socrates and Plato, it is the *adequate and universally valid* forms of thought that are called 'ideas'.

However, later (and exactly in line with one-sided empiricism – Locke, Berkeley, Hume and their successors) the word 'idea' and its derivative, the adjective 'ideal', once again became a simple collective term for any mental phenomena, for even a fleeting, mental state of an individual 'self', and this

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16. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 19.

17. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 197.



usage also obtained enough power to maintain quite a stable tradition, which has survived, as we can see, to this day.<sup>18</sup>

Destroying the watershed between ideas and sensual images, empiricists lose the ability not only to solve but even to pose correctly the problem of the ideal. In his day, Hegel spoke ironically that Englishmen ‘call a simple image – of a dog, for example – an *idea*’.<sup>19</sup> By doing so, they could hardly deny the presence of ideas in the head of this very dog. The order and connection of ‘ideas’ like that certainly have nothing in common with the order and connection of things, including that real social tie which Plato called ‘*politeia*’. The former tie is an associative relationship, the ‘passive order of perceptions’ (Hegel); while the latter one is a logical, active, cause-effect relationship.

The duality of the contents of our mind is due to the fact that the human mind is a servant of two masters. It handles both the vital activity of the organic body of man and the cultural life of society. The body pays to the psyche for its work by *sensations* (light, acoustic, muscular, and so on), and the society pays by *ideas*. The ideal is a reality entirely social, cultural and historical through and through.

The ideal is present only where there is an individual performing his activity in forms given to him by the preceding development of humanity. Man is distinguished from animals by the existence of an ideal plane of activity...<sup>20</sup>

The ideal is therefore nothing else than the form of things, but existing outside things, namely in man, in the form of his living activity, *the socially determined form of the human being's activity*.<sup>21</sup>

The logical structure of ideal representation, in Ilyenkov, appears this way: the essence of thing *A* is mirrored in the natural form of thing *B*, and in such a way that the nature of the thing-mirror *B* by no means mingles with the nature of the thing *A* which it represents.

This analogy with the mirror reflection is rather conventional. The mirror reflects objects from their outer side and passively, whereas the ideal reflection grasps *the gist* of an object and is a *form of activity* with this object. In this sense Ilyenkov defines the ideal as a ‘subjective being of an object’, or ‘the determinate being<sup>22</sup> of the external thing in the phase of its becoming in the activity of the subject’.<sup>23</sup> There is nothing ideal beyond human activity.

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18. Ilyenkov 2009, pp. 11–12.

19. Hegel 1987, p. 173.

20. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 202.

21. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 189.

22. *Nalichnoe bytie* is a Russian translation for Hegel's *Dasein*.

23. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 193.

Only at this 'absolutely highest' stage of its development as thought<sup>24</sup> can Matter achieve its ideal self-expression. In the physical world, eternal and infinite laws of Nature are realised indirectly, over the infinite series of things (bodies) mutually determining each other in motion. And in the world of ideas, the same laws are realised directly and immediately by one particular finite thing which acts according to the nature of all the other things, *ex analogia universi*, to use Spinoza's words. This universal form of activity is a distinctive feature of a 'thinking thing' (*res cogitans*).

In nature itself one cannot see directly the 'pure form' of the thing, i.e. its own structure, organisation and form of movement, peculiar to it. In 'not humanised' (*neochelovechennoy*) nature the proper form and measure of a thing is always 'obstructed', 'complicated' and 'distorted' by the more or less accidental interaction with other similar things. Man in his practice extracts the proper form and measure of a thing, and orientates himself in his activity right at this form.<sup>25</sup>

In the physical world, the essence of every thing can realise itself only in part. The character and amount of its realisation depend on circumstances and countless external factors, some of which help to disclose the essence of the thing, while others impede and hinder the thing in realising its potential. That is the reason why ideally pure lines and forms are not observed here. The particular thing can only approximate to its ideal state, but never reaches it in actuality.

As in the market, sooner or later, there appears an ideal commodity-equivalent which is able to adequately express values of all other commodities, as in nature there emerges with necessity a certain thing whose form of movement – labour – allows one to express adequately the essence of any thing. Labouring man dissects the flesh of determinate being, exposing the essence of the thing and representing it in ideally pure form, separately from that very thing to which this essence belongs. Man cleanses and assumes the essences of all other things, turning them into the forms of his own activity. Where the essence of thing *A* receives such a peculiar *other-being*<sup>26</sup> within the field of activity of thing *B*, we meet with the phenomenon of the ideal.

After ceasing the activity process, the ideal materialises, having hardened in various objective forms. It can be revived and caught only by new, 'deobjectifying' action with the object of culture.

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24. 'All systems of philosophy equally recognise that thought is the absolutely highest form of development of the universe', Ilyenkov asserts, perhaps somewhat hastily; Ilyenkov 1991, p. 419.

25. Ilyenkov 1968, p. 261.

26. The Hegelian term *Anderssein*.

The definition of the ideal is thus strictly dialectical. It is that which is not, and at the same that which is; that which does not exist in the form of an external, sensuously perceived thing but at the same time does exist *as an active faculty of man*. It is being, which is, however, equal to not-being, or the determinate being of the external thing in the phase of its becoming in the activity of the subject, in the form of its inner image, requirement, urge, and aim. That is why the *ideal being* of the thing is distinguished from its *real being*. . . . The ideal is therefore the subjective being of the object, or its 'other-being', i.e. the being of one object in and through another, as Hegel expressed this situation.<sup>27</sup>

By themselves, these objects are *material*. There cannot be anything in the world besides matter in motion; Ilyenkov repeats this sacramental formula by Lenin. The ideal is only *the peculiar nexus* of material things, the special form of movement of bodies in the process of labour and within culture (created by labour). This is the mode of active representation (reflection) of the nature of things by means of other things.

There is not a thing in the world in whose natural body the ideal could not 'settle down', and equally the nature of anything can be expressed in the ideal form. Our thoughts and ideas are as various as Nature itself. Man is an ideal 'mirror of the world', *speculum mundi*. All of the infinite Universe, from elementary particles to stars and galaxies, is turned into his 'inorganic body'. The artefacts, made by human labour, are, as it were, the 'money' of Nature. The essence of each thing and the laws of Nature are exchanged for artefacts, acquiring here-with their ideal expression.

The sense of beauty is considered by Ilyenkov as an index of the ideality of a representation. Advanced aesthetic feeling (creative imagination, fantasy, and so forth) makes it possible to discover intuitively – prior to especially logical analysis – the root of the matter, hidden from the ordinary senses.

Under the form of beauty the 'natural' measure of the thing is seized. In its 'natural' form, i.e. in nature as it is, this measure never appears in its pure expression, in all its 'transparency', as it occurs due to human activity, in the retort of civilisation, i.e. in the 'artificially created' nature.<sup>28</sup>

The natural organs of sense scan the external contours of things. And imagination enables us to look under this 'shell of the universe' to see the internal nexus of things. Beauty is a measure of concordance of the exterior appearance of a thing to its genotype, or *Gattungswesen* (generic essence), as the young Marx would say.

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27. Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 192–3.

28. Ilyenkov 1968, pp. 261–2.

An animal sees in outward things only that which conforms to its organic need. Aesthetically developed man perceives things as they are, from the viewpoint of their own substance, casting aside all that is attendant and worthless. 'Wipe off the accidental lines – And you will see: the world is fine'.<sup>29</sup>

The highest refined forms of sensory perception are created and developed by art. Ilyenkov devoted a lengthy article, *On the Aesthetic Nature of Fantasy*, to the analysis of interrelations between two ideal forms of human activity – artistic and scientific-theoretical.<sup>30</sup> Ilyenkov studied the function of creative imagination in the process of scientific cognition. He challenges Hegel's opinion that art and artistic imagination is a lower form of activity in comparison to science. However, another opinion (proposed by Schelling and the German Romantics), affirming the priority of artistic feeling over discursive thought, seems equally unacceptable to Ilyenkov. These spheres of the ideal reality, alongside the third one – the sphere of morality – are equal in rights and equally derived in respect to the substance of human life, which is *labour*, the process of the practical transformation of the external world and of man himself in his social relations.

## II

Ilyenkov's 1962 article 'The Ideal' gave rise to strident debates. The approval of the objectivity of ideal forms was regarded by many as Hegelianism, as sheer idealism. The first critical article against Ilyenkov's conception of the ideal appeared only at the end of the 1960s though. The attack was launched by a little-known philosopher David Dubrovsky. To his mind, each sensation or an image of a thing in the brain, or any 'impression' (*perezhivanie*) at all, is ideal. For instance, upon seeing a tree, in my brain is being formed

some neurodynamical system, caused by the impact of the tree and responsible for the image of the tree I experience; the latter is not a material, but strictly *ideal reflection* of the object. This ideal reflection is a subjective reality, information, appearing to me in a pure form, in its seeming separation from its material substratum, viz. that neurodynamical system which is activated at the present moment in my brain by the external impact.<sup>31</sup>

Since the ideal is a special kind of information, Dubrovsky places responsibility for the final solution to the problem of the ideal upon cybernetics. Relying on the data of neurophysiology and mathematical logic, cybernetics will decrypt the

29. From the poem 'Requital' by Alexandr Blok, 1911.

30. See Ilyenkov 1964.

31. Dubrovsky 1968, p. 126.

'neurodynamical code of subjective phenomena' and simulate thinking, communication and other ideal processes.

From such a perspective, the ideal entirely loses any objectivity, turning into the full synonym of the 'subjective', into its dumb shadow. The ideal is a property of the 'brain neurodynamical structures', which are the objective reality.

Dubrovsky's reasonings are replete with references to the contemporary achievements of the natural sciences. He is prudent to avoid political economy, and does not try to follow Ilyenkov into the labyrinths of *Capital* and still hope to examine Marx's concept of the ideal. If Dubrovsky announces, for example, that *price*, as an 'ideal being of a commodity' (*ideale Dasein der Ware*), is a *subjective reality*, then it becomes hardly possible to distinguish Marx from Keynes. And anyone who suggests to cyberneticians that they venture to decrypt the neurodynamical code of price or other ideal forms of value would be considered simply a cretin.

An old materialistic notion – that the soul is a property of the body (in particular, the brain) – is concealed under the new-fangled neurocybernetic suit. Such a materialism may be called *somatic*, in order to distinguish it from *practical* materialism, which considers the objective activity of man, social labour, to be the substance of all ideal phenomena.

Three months later, *Voprosy Filosofii* published Ilyenkov's answer to Dubrovsky.<sup>32</sup> Oddly enough, the term 'ideal' does not figure there, while the matter concerns such purely ideal subjects as *personality* and *talent*. Ilyenkov agrees readily that the mental functions, one and all, are realised by the brain, and naturally have their correlates in the 'neurodynamical architectonics'. And these brain structures in turn are determined partially by genetics and partially by the living circumstances of each individual.

The question is whether these structures can be regarded as *the first origin*, 'substance' of the ideal form of human activity. Ilyenkov gives a negative answer to this question, referring to the simple 'scientifically certified fact' that in the course of the evolution of living creatures, the number of 'degrees of freedom' of their activity is growing. And to an equal degree, the dependence of their behaviour from the structure of nerve knots is diminishing. The higher the level of the development of an individual, the less its behaviour is determined by genetically assigned stereotypes (instincts), and the more diverse are those schemata of behaviour which are formed during its lifetime, that is, the *psychic* in the proper sense of the word.

In human beings this freedom reaches its maximum, acquiring *complete* independence from the genetically inherited structure of the brain. The highest ideal

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32. See Ilyenkov 1968.

psychical functions are formed only on condition that the schemata of brain activity are dictated *utterly and completely* by the nature of things, represented in artefacts. And these functions are inherited, propagated not via chromosomes, but via cultural forms of things created by labour.

Only on this soil, on the soil of culture, genuine originality blossoms, the genuine, i.e. specifically human, individuality which is called, in the language of science, the *personality*.<sup>33</sup>

Earlier, in the middle of the 1960s, Ilyenkov started to participate in the Zagorsk experiment with deaf-blind children, under the direction of A.I. Meshcheryakov. Here, the process of forming the personality is extended in time, giving the opportunity to witness, as if in slow motion, *the moment of birth of the ideal* – the emergence of the human self.

In the eyes of Ilyenkov, the all-round harmonious development of personality is the final aim and sense of world history. In his book *On Idols and Ideals*, metamorphoses of the ideal of perfect personality are traced over the course of human history. The author's intention reminds one of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: travelling through minds and countries, the 'beautiful ideal' proves itself and improves itself after every new clash with reality.

The second round of polemics between Ilyenkov and Dubrovsky may have occurred seven to eight years later, but *Dialectics of the Ideal* never saw the light of day during Ilyenkov's lifetime.<sup>34</sup> After the author's death, the manuscript appeared at last, but almost all the criticism at Dubrovsky's expense was for some reason excised by the editors of *Voprosy Filosofii*.

The affair took a different turn after the publishing of the manuscript by M.A. Lifshits *On the Ideal and the Real*. This publication was also posthumous and abridged.<sup>35</sup> Mikhail Aleksandrovich belonged to the first Soviet generation of philosophers. By some miracle Lifshits survived the 'discussions' of Stalin's times when, in Lifshits's own words, 'argumentation resembled the sound of a falling mine – hello from hell'. Ilyenkov was acquainted with Lifshits since the beginning of the 1950s, and they communicated in a friendly way until the end of Ilyenkov's life. It is not easy to understand why Lifshits commenced the 'dialogue' concerning the ideal only after the death of his friend.

He treated the ideal as some 'limit' of sensuously perceived things – the 'real abstractions' to which things can approach, having no prospect of success. Actually, such is the most widespread meaning of the word 'ideal' in ordinary

33. Ilyenkov 1968, p. 152.

34. Only a fragment was published in English; see Ilyenkov 1977.

35. See Lifshits 1984. The full version came to the light only in our century; see Lifshits 2003.

language and the language of science: the imaginary pattern, the acme of perfection in some work or a class of things. Lifshits had little interest in that phenomenon of representation (the active *quid pro quo*, the 'ideal positing' of itself as the other, and vice versa), which was called the ideal by Marx and, after him, Ilyenkov.

Any dialogue or polemic has a sense only on the condition that both parties speak about the same subject. Every disagreement presupposes the tacit consent, at least consent concerning the meaning of the words. But Lifshits starts his 'dialogue' by changing the *meaning of the term*. His 'ideal' has as little in common with 'ideal' in Ilyenkov as the constellation of the Dog has in common with 'man's best friend'. Ilyenkov looks for ideal forms in the world of human activity, in real objectively-practical relationships among people, while Lifshits's thought hovers in the world of abstractions, such as 'ideal gas', 'ideal crystal', and so on.

Unlike Dubrovsky, Lifshits tries to appeal to Marx's works where he finds the distinction of *Ideal* and *Ideelle*. Lifshits complains that the Russian language does not have two terms for rendering the difference (moreover, 'the contrast') of these two categories.

*Ideelle* means mental, existing in head, immaterial... Marx's *Ideelle* is translated as 'ideal', but it means the ideas in our heads, something mental, belonging to consciousness. All the excellent quotations Ilyenkov gives to vindicate his thesis, refer not to ideal, but to contents of human thought, which can be as ideal or as not ideal at all. Everywhere in such quotations Marx uses not *Ideale*, but *Ideelle*.<sup>36</sup>

In this instance, Lifshits is wrong. Actually, he simply did not even trouble himself to check these 'excellent quotations'. For example, take this one from the *Grundrisse*:

Indem die Konsumtion das Bedürfnis *neuer* Produktion schafft, also den idealen, innerlich treibenden Grund der Produktion, der ihre Voraussetzung ist... [D]ie Konsumtion den Gegenstand der Produktion *ideal setzt*, als innerliches Bild, als Bedürfnis, als Trieb und als Zweck.<sup>37</sup>

As we can see, the adjective *ideale* figures here twice, and precisely in the very meaning Lifshits ascribes to the term *ideelle*: as 'anticipation' of something not yet real; as 'existent in idea', still not materialised; and above all, as 'inner image' and 'purpose' of human activity. Marx's *objectively-practical* concept of *ideale*, carried on by Ilyenkov, absolutely does not accord with the *contemplatively-aesthetic* concept of the ideal in Lifshits.

36. Lifshits 1984, p. 130.

37. Marx 1953, p. 13.

The typical Hegelian term 'ideal positing' is italicised by Marx. It seems strange that Lifshits could have missed this, reading the famous Introduction (*Einleitung*) to the original version of *Capital*. Ilyenkov cites this passage both in *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* (the article *Ideal*) and in *Dialectical Logic*. Consumption of the product of labour is an internal, ideal moment of production itself. In the process of consumption, man not only *really* reproduces his labour power, but also *ideally* produces

the form itself of man's living activity, or the faculty of creating an object of a certain form and using it for its purpose, i.e. according to its role and function in the social organism. In the form of a living, active faculty of man as the agent of social production, the object, as an outcome of production, exists ideally, i.e. as an inner image, requirement, and an urge and aim of human activity.<sup>38</sup>

If the activity-oriented concept of the ideal in Ilyenkov *de facto* arises from the logical analysis of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, among the dozen of quotations with which Lifshits decorated his work on the ideal there is *not a single instance* in which the term *Ideale* should be used. If, while reading Marx's writings, he happened upon just one piece of *direct textual evidence* for his interpretation of the ideal as 'some standard or pattern which can be achieved only through infinite approximation',<sup>39</sup> then Lifshits would hardly have lost such opportunity to cite the testimony of the 'church father'.

It seems to me that Lifshits was quite right in considering that Ilyenkov paid too little attention to the difference between the terms *Ideale* and *Ideelle*. Another matter is that the terms are not at all *directly opposite* or 'contrary', as Lifshits argued with reference to Schelling (obviously, for lack of a better witness). In fact, Marx opposes both 'idealities' to *reality*. At the same time, *Ideale* and *Ideelle* are drawn together, expressing two different aspects of one and the same social relationship (for example, the relation of consumption to production, or commodities to money).

Aside from that, Lifshits's attack on Ilyenkov rests upon sheer misunderstanding. For some obscure reason, he thought that Ilyenkov limited the ideal to the sphere of social consciousness. But the latter said nothing of the kind. It is Lifshits himself who has drawn such a conclusion 'by means of the algebraic conversion of quotations'.<sup>40</sup> And then he devotes the main part of his 'dialogue' to a refutation of this misreading.

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<sup>38</sup> Ilyenkov 1974, p. 189.

<sup>39</sup> Lifshits 1984, p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> 'So, by means of the algebraic conversion of quotations we have made it clear that "the form of activity of social man", which is called the ideal, is a form of social consciousness'; Lifshits 1984, p. 123.



Many times Ilyenkov repeated that the ideal is a *form of objectively-practical activity*, that it is a special *relation of things* in which they are placed by human labour.<sup>41</sup> The objective ideal relationship between things is *only reflected* by social consciousness, and most often it is reflected inadequately, in a mystically 'inverted form', religious or economical (fetishism of the commodity). The ideal is not a form of consciousness; on the contrary, consciousness is a form of expression of that ideal relationship of representation, which emerges between material things in the process of labour. Lifshits interpreted it in reverse.

If Dubrovsky considered the ideal as a *purely subjective* phenomenon, and Lifshits affirms the *absolute objectivity* of the ideal, not at all depending on human subjectivity (neither on consciousness, nor on the material-practical activity of men), then Ilyenkov sees in the ideal a '*subjective image of objective reality*'.<sup>42</sup> The mutual conversion of object and subject, the dialectical transition of the form of activity into the form of thing, and vice versa, is nothing other than *human labour*. That is why, in the eyes of Ilyenkov, labour is a living source of the ideal.

### III

Soon after the debates on the ideal had started, Karl Popper presented his report at the Third International Congress for logic, methodology and philosophy of science in 1967, in which he spoke of the 'world of *objective contents of thought*', which he called 'the third world'.<sup>43</sup> As Popper confesses, he invented this term 'for want of a better name'. For some reason he did not like the classical term 'the ideal'.

Since that time, in the philosophical literature not once did there flicker a comparison of Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal with the 'third world'. Opening the symposium on Ilyenkov, the current Chancellor of Helsinki University, Ilkka Niiniluoto, shared a memory:

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41. 'The ideal form is *the form of a thing created by social human labour*, reproducing forms of the objective material world, which exist independently of man. Or, conversely, *the form of labour realised in the substance of nature* . . . and, therefore, presenting itself to man, the creator, as *the form of a thing* or as a special *relationship between things*, a relationship in which one thing realises, reflects another, [a relationship] in whose things have been placed by man, by his labour, and which would never arise on its own'; Ilyenkov 2009, p. 60, my italics.

42. This definition of the ideal is formulated in *Philosophical Encyclopaedia* and is repeated in *Dialectical Logic*; see Ilyenkov 1962, p. 219, and Ilyenkov 1974, p. 165, respectively.

43. The term ascends to the *drittes Reich* of pure thought, as Gottlob Frege described it; see Frege 2003, p. 50.

In the late 1970s I read an English translation of Ilyenkov's article *The Concept of the Ideal*, which I found strikingly similar to Karl Popper's conception of the World 3 of human social constructions.<sup>44</sup>

Apparently, Niiniluoto believed that he was paying a compliment to Ilyenkov. But the latter should be certainly grieved if he had heard about this 'striking similarity'. Ilyenkov himself spoke of Popper in an extremely disparaging manner, even with a jeer sometimes. The concept of the third world was familiar to Ilyenkov, and he regarded it as 'a belated type of archaic objective idealism, closely resembling traditional Platonism'.<sup>45</sup>

This appraisal is hardly accurate. Popper's third world is still further from Plato's over-heavenly world of ideas than from Ilyenkov's 'dialectics of the ideal'. Firstly, the third world is open to changes. Secondly, errors dwell here alongside truths. Thirdly, it is being created by people, and does not last from the beginning of time. So, there is almost nothing of Platonism in the concept of third world. And how could it be otherwise? Popper expended a good half of his life to shatter 'the spell of Plato'. It is mainly the recognition of the autonomy of the ideal that makes Popper related to the Greek idealist.<sup>46</sup>

And therein lies Ilyenkov's objection. For Marxists, there exists only one real world – the world of 'matter in motion'. It is the world matter, ideally representing itself in itself and by means of itself, baring its innermost essence – the laws of nature – in the process of the labour activity of its higher creatures, namely thinking beings. The dialectical circuit of matter within itself disturbs the equilibrium of discursive reason (*rassudok*, *Verstand*) with its formal logic. The world begins to trifurcate in the 'mind's eye' and, as a consequence, the insoluble problem of correlating knowledge and reality emerges.

To know an object – and be unable to correlate this knowledge (knowledge of the *object!*) with the object?! In actual fact, this paradoxical situation arises where a person does not really know an object, but knows something else. What? Phrases about the object. Words, terms, formulas, signs, symbols, and stable combinations thereof deposited in science, mastered (memorized) *in place of* knowledge of the object – as a special object that exists above and outside reality, as a special world of ideal, abstract, phantom 'objects'. It is here that an illusion of knowledge arises, followed by the insoluble task of relating this illusory knowledge to reality, to life...<sup>47</sup>

44. Niiniluoto 2000, p. 8.

45. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 51.

46. First of all, Popper strives to prove 'the (more or less) *independent existence of the third world*'; see Popper 1968, p. 334. 'The idea of *autonomy* is central to my theory of the third world'; Popper 1968, p. 343.

47. Ilyenkov 2002, p. 86.

Ilyenkov most probably bears in mind here the 'third world' by Popper, populated by 'linguistic entities'.<sup>48</sup>

The problem of the correlation of knowledge with a thing arises only if they are treated as two primordially different 'worlds'. Reality ('world' number one) seems to be transcendent or 'the beyond' with respect to knowledge ('world' number three), while the individual consciousness ('world' number two) is allotted a part of a medium, correlating ideas with things. All the while truth is being sheltered *between* the 'worlds' like Epicurean gods. Little wonder, then, that Popper considered truth to be a purely relative concept and altogether rejected the existence of absolute truths. However, as Ilyenkov's disciple S.N. Mareyev noticed, relative truth without the absolute truth is as the North Pole without the South – namely nonsense.

The very concept of truth is different in dialectics and formal logic. The latter demands to eliminate subjectivity – this ideal is clearly pronounced in the title of the report by Popper: 'Epistemology without a knowing subject'. By contrast, in dialectics truth is understood as a *process of transformation* of the subjective into the objective, and vice versa. And the ideal is an objective form of a subject's activity.

It is precisely *form*, not substance.<sup>49</sup> The ideal is not possessed of any autonomy in respect to its material substance (labour). There is no *interaction* whatsoever between the ideal and the material, body and mind, as Ilyenkov believes. The ideal is a form (image, function) of representing the wholly material – or *practical*, to speak more concretely – activity of man. The social labour runs 'parallel' in the attributes of extension and thought, presenting by itself simultaneously mental and corporeal action.

Labour, the process of changing nature by the action of social man, is that 'subject' to which thought belongs as 'predicate'. And nature, the universal matter of nature, is its substance. Sub-stance, having become, in the person of man, the subject of all its changes, the cause of itself (*causa sui*).<sup>50</sup>

Ilyenkov, following his favourite philosopher Spinoza, considers the phenomenon of the interaction of mind and body as *an objective appearance*, that is, the practically determined illusion, like the rotation of the Sun in heaven as it is observed from the Earth, or the phenomenon described by Marx, namely the 'reification' of social relations in the market economy. Meanwhile, Popper

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48. 'Theories, or propositions, or statements are the most important third-world linguistic entities'; Popper 1972, p. 157.

49. Allusion to the famous thesis by Ferdinand de Saussure: '*la langue est une forme et non une substance*'; see Saussure 1916, p. 169.

50. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 54.

applied much of his efforts toward defending an interaction of the first and the second worlds.<sup>51</sup>

According to Ilyenkov, consciousness is a 'mode' of the ideal reality, and not a separate world. With this view, not each and every psychical phenomenon is included into the concept of consciousness, but only higher functions which are responsible for the orientation of individuum in society, in the historically formed realm of culture. Ilyenkov excludes from the concept of consciousness any lower biological functions that constitute the material layer of psyche.

Both Popper's 'second world' and Dubrovsky's 'subjective reality' are a combination of natural and cultural psychical functions. In the course of life, our natural inclinations entangle with ideas so tightly and sophisticatedly that it becomes extremely difficult to separate this or that function into a pure form. In any natural psychical (as well as a neurophysiological and cerebral) function may well be 'ideally represented' this or that cultural-historical reality.

The easiest solution to the problem is proposed by somatic materialism. It ascribes social functions, represented in brain structures, to the nerve tissue as its natural properties, or innate faculties of a person.

Who would not call to mind here the good Dogberry teaching the night-watchman Seacoal: 'To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but reading and writing comes by nature'.<sup>52</sup>

The somatic solution to the problem of the ideal fetishises the body, endowing it with the ideal qualities alien to its biological nature.

Ilyenkov conducted a peculiar mental experiment. On behalf of Spinoza, he developed, so to say, the *ennobled* version of somatic materialism. Having been inherited by Spinoza from Descartes, the concept of the 'thinking *thing*' (*res cogitans*) was interpreted by Ilyenkov in a materialist way as the 'thinking *body*'. In so doing, thought becomes treated as a faculty of the body to move along the contours of any other bodies. Having realised the form of its own motion, the thinking body creates an 'adequate idea' about the contours of the external thing. Such is, in Ilyenkov's opinion, the principle of 'intuitive cognition' in Spinoza.<sup>53</sup>

While reading the second essay of *Dialectical Logic*, it may seem that this Spinoza is an alter-ego of Ilyenkov. Such is the approval and outright sympathy with which the conception of the 'thinking body' is presented. Meanwhile, it entirely lacks an understanding of the social, cultural-historical nature of thought. Ilyenkov himself (as the real Spinoza thought) never considered thought to be a

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51. See Popper 1994.

52. Marx 1962, p. 98.

53. See Ilyenkov 1974, p. 44.

‘property, predicate, attribute of body’.<sup>54</sup> This view of thought was shared by the antagonists of Ilyenkov – the vulgar Diamatians and Dubrovsky – as well as the antagonists of the rationalist Spinoza – empiricists like Thomas Hobbes.

Body and mind are tied not with the formal-logical ‘subject-predicate’ relationship, but with the dialectical relationship of identity of the diverse, as a twofold expression of one and the same substance. And adequate ideas seize not the external, spatial contours, but the very essence of things. To Spinoza, this is the difference between the ideas of intellect and imagination (confused, inadequate cognition).

At the very end of the essay, Ilyenkov sets straight his Spinoza on behalf of Marx, saying that the subject of thought is not the body but ‘social man’ whose labour changes both external nature and himself. Nevertheless, a good many of Ilyenkov’s pupils took the conception of the ‘thinking body’ at face value. By now, a mighty somatic wing has formed in the Ilyenkov school. A.V. Surmava, in the manner of Popper’s evolutionary epistemology, extends the notion of the ideal to the activities of animals. L.K. Naumenko goes further still, turning the ideal into the property of ‘negentropicity’, inherent in each physical body – from crystal in a solution to prince Hamlet. With this, the ideal is identified with the ‘reasonable, purposeful’, and is obeyed as the ‘law of improbability’.

For Ilyenkov, he denied in the most insistent tone the existence of the ideal beyond the circle of man’s objectively-practical activity.

In nature itself, including the nature of man as a biological creature, the ideal does not exist. As regards the natural, material organisation of the human body it has the same ‘external’ character as it does in regard to the material in which it is realised. . . . The *material* being of the ideal is not itself ideal but only *the form of its expression in the organic body of the individual*. In itself the ideal is the socially determined form of man’s life activity corresponding to the form of its object and product.<sup>55</sup>

For a correctly understood category of the ‘ideal’ includes precisely those – and only those – forms of reflection that specifically distinguish humans, and are completely alien and unknown to any animal, even one with a highly developed higher nervous system, activity and psychology. Precisely these – and only these – specific forms of reflection of the external world by the *human* head have always been investigated by the science of philosophy under the designation: ‘ideal’ forms of mental activity; it retained this term precisely for the sake of their delimitation from all others.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Ilyenkov 1974, p. 23.

55. Ilyenkov 1962, p. 221. This argument is repeated verbatim in *Dialectical Logic*; see Ilyenkov 1977, pp. 189–90.

56. Ilyenkov 2009, p. 20.

The assertion of the *socially-practical nature of the ideal* is the most significant distinction and feature of Ilyenkov's theory as presented in *Dialectical Logic*, and stands in contrast to the theories of Lifshits and Popper, Dubrovsky and Naumenko, as well as those of Spinoza-materialists.<sup>57</sup>

All living and non-living creatures – excepting the human being – act according to their own species, 'selfishly'. It is man alone who can act universally, like Nature itself, who is able to make himself the 'measure of all things', the ideal 'mirror of the world'. This universal form of human activity, which, as Marx said, 'makes all nature his *inorganic body*', is nothing other than the *ideal* in Ilyenkov: the active form of expressing or representing the general within the singular, the infinite within the finite – 'all nature' within man, and vice versa.

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57. 'The actions of animals, especially of the higher animals, are also subsumed, though to a limited degree, under Spinoza's definition of thinking'; Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 34–5). But under Ilyenkov's definition of the *ideal*, the actions of animals are not at all subsumed. The real Spinoza also pointed out the principle difference of a 'thinking thing' from the 'most stupid ass' (*asinus turpissimus*). He applies the term *res cogitans* only to the human mind and its mother-substance.



# Metamorphoses of Meaning: The Concept of the Ideal from a Semiotic Perspective

Tarja Knuuttila

This mystical, mysterious reality does not have its own material body, which is why it easily changes one material form of its incarnation for another, persisting in all of its 'incarnations' and 'metamorphoses'<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

What is the place of the ideal in the material world? And how, in particular, can a decidedly materialist philosophy account for ideal phenomena such as values, abstractions and meanings? In his essay 'Dialectics of the Ideal', Evald Ilyenkov attempts to give an answer to this age-old and profound philosophical question concerning the status of immaterial properties in the material world. Although Ilyenkov's answer to this question is ingenious and in line with the recent developments in semiotics, as I will show, the way he casts the problem of the ideal may prove difficult to comprehend for present-day readers. Accordingly, in 'Dialectics of the Ideal' Ilyenkov repeatedly invokes expressions like 'form of a thing' and 'form of a social human life-activity': 'The ideal form of a thing is a form of social human life-activity, which exists not in that life-activity, but, namely, as a form of the external thing, which represents, reflects another thing. Conversely, it is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely, as a form of human life-activity, in man, "inside man"'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See p. 39.

2. See p. 68.



Expressions like this may confuse more than clarify, at least for readers not well-versed in Marxist philosophy. This applies also to the way Ilyenkov iterates his various characterisations of the ideal, giving it slightly different formulations page after page. To be sure, the way Ilyenkov circles around the ideal without arriving at any definition remains faithful to his conception of the ideal. If the ideal is, as Ilyenkov seeks to show, something that is in the process of continuous movement, being constantly born and reborn, made and remade, in the course of our different activities, then how could it be hypostatised, frozen into an object of definition? Maybe it can only be shown, pointed at and then carefully followed in its dialectical metamorphoses.

Instead of getting lost in the philosophical subtleties of the question of how to capture a phenomenon as volatile as the ideal, I shall take a short cut. The phenomena of meaning and meaning-making are perhaps the most familiar examples of the ideal. Ilyenkov himself draws heavily on Marx's analysis of the value-form in his attempt to pinpoint the concept of the ideal. Although he does not say that much about the phenomenon of meaning, this theme constantly recurs in his writings on the ideal. It therefore seems worthwhile taking up the theme of meaning, in order to question how the concept of the ideal relates to the study of signs and meanings: namely semiotics.

In this paper, I am going to discuss the concept of the ideal in relation to Umberto Eco's semiotic theory and his notion of the *encyclopedia*. By encyclopedia, Eco means the totality of knowledge generated by humans, which is the cognitive background of any act of understanding or meaning-making. This knowledge is stored in our artefacts, which, for Eco, appear as an 'enormous library composed of all books and encyclopedias – all papers and manuscripts, documents of all centuries, including the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians and the inscriptions in cuneiform'.<sup>3</sup> This resembles the way Ilyenkov invokes the Hegelian vision of 'the whole grandiose materially established intellectual culture of the human race, in and through which this individual awakens to "self-consciousness"'.<sup>4</sup> According to Ilyenkov, it 'confronts the individual' as

the thought of preceding generations realised [осуществленное] ('reified', 'objectified', 'alienated') in sensuously perceptible 'matter' – in language and in visually perceptible images, in books and statues, in wood and bronze, in the form of places of worship and instruments of labour, in the designs of machines and state buildings, in the patterns of scientific and moral systems, and so on and so forth.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Eco 1994, p. 90.

4. See p. 52.

5. See p. 52.

Thus, both Eco and Ilyenkov stress how meanings are 'objectified' into the artefactual sphere, but somehow this insight gets partly lost in Eco's subsequent semantic analysis. I will argue that the artefactuality and the materiality of signs are eventually downplayed in Eco's analysis, since the *activity of meaning-making* coupled with the *transformation of the material world* is largely omitted from his otherwise sophisticated and careful semiotic view. As a result, despite his intention to the contrary, Eco seems to pass from the analysis of the ideal to idealism. This happens once the ideal is considered in terms of an independent system of meanings existing quite apart from signifying social practices. As Ilyenkov's account of the ideal focuses on the dialectical process in which the ideal is generated, his perspective provides an important corrective to Eco's vision. Interestingly, the recent developments in social semiotics have moved in the direction outlined by Ilyenkov.

## 2. The encyclopedia according to Umberto Eco

It is widely agreed that most, if not all, sign-relations are at least partly conventional. Thus, the concept of convention has been and continues to be a very important one for semiotics. However, too often semiotic analyses become somehow rooted to the notion of convention as if it were a kind of ultimate explanatory principle. It has proven difficult to approach especially the concept of sign and the purported 'sign-systems' from any other angle. Umberto Eco has made extensive use of convention in his semiotics, yet he sees clearly that semiotics also has to deal with the genesis of signs and new conventions. But oddly enough, this insight leads Eco to divide his semiotic theory into two parts – on the one hand, a *theory of codes*, and on the other, a *theory of sign production*. One may ask why.

At first sight, it would seem that Eco divides his theory into two parts because he is following the Saussurean tradition of distinguishing between a signification *system* and a communication *process*. But Eco denies that his distinction between a theory of codes and a theory of sign production corresponds to the one between *langue* and *parole*.<sup>6</sup> Eco has something else in mind. He claims:

*every act of communication to or between human beings – or other intelligent biological or mechanical apparatus – presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition. It is possible, if not perhaps particularly desirable, to establish a semiotics of signification independently of a semiotics of*

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6. Eco 1976, p. 4.

communication: but it is impossible to establish a semiotics of communication without a semiotics of signification.<sup>7</sup>

In this view, there is a strange asymmetry, which is certainly reflected in the practice of semioticians – Eco included. Semiotic study has often been understood, especially in the continental tradition, as a study of the different signifying systems. These systems have been understood as being composed of the different *codes* that govern meaning-making and our cultural behaviour. From Eco's point of view, a culture appears to be a heterogeneous set of partly overlapping codes, which are of a different degree of organisation. Eco's analysis of the codes is basically componential and has its roots in structural semantics. Codes provide the rules according to which the elements of the conveying system are coupled with the elements of the conveyed system. In other words, codes generate as well as organise sign-functions, which correlate two *functives* – namely expression and content – together. But this is just a first approximation, because the functives are to be further analysed in their markers. So the sign-function becomes a relation between a given set of syntactic markers and a given set of semantic markers. Accordingly, both the expression plane and the content plane of a sign-function are composed of more elementary components. As a semiotician, Eco is most interested in the componential analysis of the content plane, that is, the analysis of meanings in terms of semantic units. He approaches this question through the distinction between dictionary and encyclopedia.

### *The dictionary vs. the encyclopedia*

According to the theoretical concept of the dictionary, the meaning of linguistic expressions can be represented through a finite number of semantic *primitives* (which can also be called primes, components, markers, properties, units or universal concepts, depending on the theory in question). The basic idea behind the dictionary-based semantics is that there is a set of innate 'concepts' that underlie our inherited human language faculty. These concepts are encoded in words and they are undefinable: we are supposed to know them without having to define them. The meanings of other words are then constructed from these primitives.<sup>8</sup> Table (1) gives one example of semantic primitives and their classification. In principle, the number of primitives could also be infinite – but obviously this makes the task of componential analysis impossible. So, ideally at least, the dictionary definition of a term should be composed of a limited number of primitives. Then the problems are, firstly, how to determine the

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7. Eco 1976, p. 9.

8. See, for example, Wierzbicka 1996 and Goddard 2002.

Table 1. Some semantic primitives. The table is adapted from Goddard 2002

Proposed and experimentally supported semantic primes						
Category	Primes					
Substantives	I	you	someone/ person	people		
Relational Substantives	something/ thing	body	kind	part		
Determiners	this	the same	other			
Quantifiers	one	two	some	all	many/ much	
Evaluators	good	bad				
Descriptors	big	small				
Mental/Experiential Predicates	think	know	want	feel	see	hear
Speech	say	words	true			
Actions and Events	do	happen	move			
Existence and Possession	there is/exist	have				
Life and Death	live	die				
Time	when/time	now	before	after	a long time	a short time
	for some time	moment				
Space	where/ place	here	above	below	far	near
	side	inside	touch (contact)			
Logical Concepts	not	maybe	can	because	if	
Intensifier, Augmentor	very	more				
Similarity	like/way					

Source: [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic\\_primes](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_primes)

primitives, and, secondly, how to guarantee that their number is a finite one.<sup>9</sup> Eco proceeds to claim that the two questions cannot be resolved at the same time. As different researchers have proposed different primitives, one can legitimately

9. Eco 1984, p. 49.

ask whether there actually are any primitives intuitively known to all speakers. And if there are not, then the primitives have to be interpreted as well. To make them interpretable, theory usually has to consider them as an unordered set and adopt cross-classificatory relations between primitives. But the only way to limit the number of the primitives is to have the meaning-relations hierarchically structured.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, one either has a limited number of uninterpreted primitives, or the primitives are interpreted, but the meaning-relations are unordered and potentially infinite. Allowing unordered and potentially infinite meaning-relations brings us to the idea of encyclopedia: any dictionary is but an encyclopedia in disguise.

The concept of encyclopedia preserves componential analysis, but denies that signs could be analytically reduced into a limited number of meaning components in any sensible way. In the case of an encyclopedia, then, it is no longer reasonable to talk of primitives. This also means that we have taken a definite step from the innate concepts to the realm of culture: Eco conceives of meaning as *cultural units* that are composed of all the knowledge made available by our culture. As a result, any analysis of meaning is potentially endless – a sign can invoke a limitless number of markers. Eco explains this by the notion of an *interpretant* (taken from C.S. Peirce). A sign's interpretant can be defined as 'another representation which is referred to the same "object"'.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, the only means to establish an interpretant of a sign is by way of using another sign, which in turn invokes another interpretant, and so on and so forth.

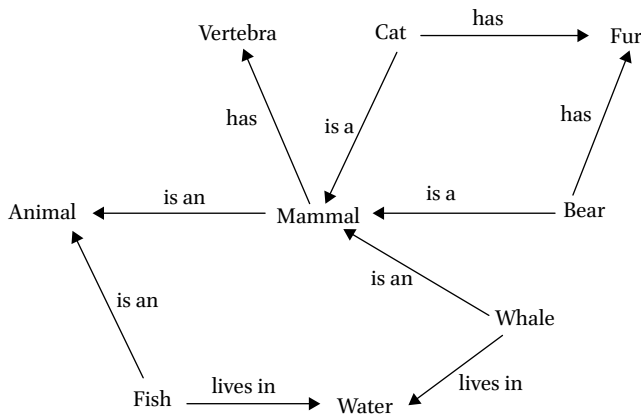
From this insight Eco proceeds to his idea of a *model Q*, which is devised in accordance with M. Ross Quillian's 1968 proposal for a model for semantic memory. Model Q is an n-dimensional network in which one can move from a sign (which is taken as a *type*, for example, 'type A') by employing a series of sign-vehicles to any other place in the network, 'from the center to the farthest periphery'. These sign-vehicles, as interpretants, are included in the model as *tokens*, but each of them becomes in its turn a new type, for example, a 'type B'. The interest in semantic networks and the Semantic Web have arisen from these kinds considerations. Figure (1) provides an example of a simple semantic network.<sup>12</sup> One can think of Model Q as an intertextual space or an ever-growing hypertext in which any point could at least in principle be connected to another.

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10. Eco's 1995 book, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, examines various historical attempts to attain a language that would unambiguously grasp the essence of all possible things. The idea of deriving in a hierarchic and orderly fashion all possible meanings from a set of semantic primitives is one recurring variant of this search.

11. Eco 1976, p. 68.

12. There has been a lot of research on semantic networks and the Semantic Web in the field of artificial intelligence. The way Eco relates the Peircean notion of interpretant to the notion of semantic network is interesting as the existential graphs of C.S. Peirce are clearly the forerunners of semantic networks.



Source: [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic\\_network](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_network)

Figure 1. An example of a simple semantic network.

However, in practice no interpretative process is endless, and Eco explains this by the fact that some connections are statistically more probable than others.

In the distinction between dictionaries and encyclopedias there is more at stake than merely whether the analysis of meaning is based upon a finite or potentially infinite number of innate concepts. In other words, the original insight behind the division between a dictionary and an encyclopedia is simply to distinguish between the knowledge of the semantics of a language and the knowledge of the real world, and it dates back at least to John Locke. Locke wanted to know which complex ideas we know from experience and which are acquired via other ideas. So, the 'dictionaries relate words to other words' whereas 'encyclopedias relate words to extralinguistic facts'.<sup>13</sup> Bertrand Russell thought that words could be divided into two classes: the so-called 'object-words' acquire their meaning by direct association between a word and a thing; then there are 'dictionary words', the meaning of which we learn through verbal definition. However, for Russell, the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description varies between people, depending upon their life-experiences.<sup>14</sup>

With his concept of the encyclopedia, Eco hopes to show that this way of distinguishing between a dictionary and an encyclopedia is untenable. He seems to agree with Haiman that 'the relations of sense in themselves are useless, unless the words are at some point anchored at reality'.<sup>15</sup> He has numerous examples to show how the analysis of meaning is not only dependent upon the contextual

13. Haiman 1980, p. 333.

14. Russel 1940, pp. 65–70.

15. Haiman 1980, p. 336.

but also extra-linguistic facts.<sup>16</sup> But surprisingly, at the same time, Eco wants to do without the referent in his semiotics. For him, the theory of codes is concerned only with intentional semantics.<sup>17</sup> How can this be achieved if all meaning-relationships are tied to our world knowledge? Eco attempts to include these factors in his semantic analysis. His aim is to 'outline a theory of codes which takes into account even rules of discursive competence, text formation, contextual and circumstantial (or situational) disambiguation, therefore proposing a semantics which solves within its own framework many problems of the so-called pragmatics'.<sup>18</sup>

Once all of these things are represented in the language, or by the means of some other (coded or codable) signs, then it becomes possible to move in the semantic space without any referral to the real world. Encyclopedia becomes a self-sufficient, self-referring world of our semiotic systems. For Eco, all languages (that is, all kinds of semiotic systems) form together an 'autoclarificatory system'. A 'sort of molecular landscape', as he puts it, emerges. In this landscape the 'so-called "things" are only the surface appearance assumed by an underlying network of more elementary units'.<sup>19</sup> Yet, according to Eco, our semantic universe in its entirety is unrepresentable. Only (small) parts of it can be analysed, on a temporary basis, because the semantic universe is 'highly mobile'. But the conception of a self-sufficient semantic/semiotic universe – undergoing constant change resulting from the unceasing semiotic process – is obscure to say the least. It is as if it were somehow self-moving and self-adjusting. No wonder Eco has been accused of idealism – in spite of his claims to the contrary.<sup>20</sup>

The question is: why does Eco want to retain this idealistic and unrepresentable 'construction' he calls the encyclopedia? Interestingly, he does not deny its uncertain ontological status, and claims it is ultimately only 'a semiotic postulate, a regulative idea'.<sup>21</sup> 'Semiotics must proceed to isolate structures *as if* a definite general structure existed',<sup>22</sup> otherwise it could not explain 'how meaning comes into existence'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Eco appears to think that something like the notion of the encyclopedia is needed in order to explain our linguistic and, more generally, semiotic competence. It is as if the encyclopedia was a common database for us all, and our individual semantic/semiotic

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16. See, for example, Eco 1979a, 1979b, 1990.

17. Eco 1976, p. 59.

18. Eco 1976, p. 4.

19. Eco 1976, p. 49.

20. See, for example, Carravetta 1998; Deely 1997.

21. Eco 1984, p. 68.

22. Eco 1976, p. 129.

23. Eco 1976, p. 83.

competences consisted of our access to that database.<sup>24</sup> Still, individual competences – semantic or otherwise – are very different. It seems that our abilities to use this database (presupposing that such a database actually exists) vary considerably among individuals. This raises the question of how are our abilities then generated. Surely, this cannot be explained solely by the properties (and contents) of the database, which means that the relationship between our competences and the encyclopedia is not addressed.

Diego Marconi, another Italian who has studied dictionaries and encyclopedias, thinks it unwise to talk about an encyclopedic competence:

In the case of words, genuine competence cannot be idealised to include encyclopedic knowledge... The gap is just too wide. We do not work that way: if people like you and me are competent users of whatever language we speak, then it cannot be the case that lexical competence coincides with encyclopedic knowledge, not even 'idealised' competence.<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, Eco is not describing any individual or empirical competences with his concept of encyclopedia, but rather the competence of a whole (linguistic) community. But how can a *community* have a semantic competence? 'In reality', Eco concedes, 'this *competence* is the sum of the individual competences that constitute the code. What was called "the code" is the sum of the individual competences that constitute the code as a collective convention'.<sup>26</sup> But then the question arises as to whether there is any language beyond a collection of idiolects.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the point that the encyclopedia is held together by a collection of conventions prohibits this kind of conclusion – and, moreover, it seems problematic how the meaning units can ever become coded into and co-ordinated by the collective encyclopedia. One surmises that this has something to do with the subjects and the real material world, which were left out of the theory of codes.

Eco relegates the burden of explaining the relations between our semantic/semiotic systems and the external world to a theory of sign production. Curiously, although Eco's theory of codes is a theory of public/conventional/'coded' cultural meanings, he presents his theory of sign production in terms of individual work in general, and artistic creation in particular.<sup>28</sup> This might be the basic

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24. See, for example, Eco 1990, pp. 263–82.

25. Marconi 1997, p. 46.

26. Eco 1976, p. 125. In contrast, Ilyenkov explicitly states that 'social consciousness is not simply the individual consciousness repeated many times'; see below, p. 47.

27. Marconi 1997, p. 53.

28. See, for example, critical remarks by Ponzio 1993, p. 34. In addition to artistic creation, Eco's theory of sign production is mostly interested in arguing for the conventionality of the iconic sign, which is often thought to be in some natural or 'motivated' relation to its object (see Caesar 1999, pp. 67–9). This is, of course, in line with Eco's idea of treating the encyclopedia as if it were independent of the real world.



reason why Eco's semiotic theory divides into two separate parts: the theory of codes and the theory of sign production. The individual, as well as the rather abstract nature of Eco's sign production, is well exemplified by his classification of the modes of sign production. These are outlined by observing four specific parameters: the *physical labour* needed to produce expressions, the *type/token-ratio*, the type of *continuum* to be shaped and the mode and complexity of *articulation*. Collective work, material tools and division of labour do not feature in the analysis. The sign-production is essentially, for Eco, a question of *mapping* a certain content or content-type onto a material continuum (that is, expression continuum).<sup>29</sup> This can be done according to established mapping conventions, and in the case in which these conventions do not yet exist, they have to be somehow created and imposed. For Eco, this is a problem of organising one's perception according to the new conventions one is inventing during the same process.

But how do the fruits of this individual production ever become conventionalised, that is, part of our culture? Eco treats this question simply as a matter of public acceptance. It seems to me that this is an overlooked point of some other interesting semiotic theories as well, such as, for instance, those of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Rules and conventions are social, but the breaking of the rules, invention and creation are individual and exceptional. The semiotic production is thus apprehended according to an (individualistic) model of artistic creation. In my opinion this view should be, at least, complemented with another model – the model of *social* labour, or activity.

### 3. The concept of the ideal

Writing about the concept of the ideal, Ilyenkov expends much effort in explaining why the ideal cannot be located in consciousness or neural activity. The dividing line between the 'material' or 'real', and the 'ideal' cannot be drawn according to what is outside or inside the consciousness or brain. Ideal phenomena are, thus, not mental or 'cerebral, neurodynamic' phenomena, nor are they projections onto reality.<sup>30</sup> They are, according to Ilyenkov, objective reality that is 'independent of the individual with his body and "soul"'.<sup>31</sup> Yet the emergence

29. See, for example, Eco 1976, p. 249.

30. Cf. Bakhurst 1991, p. 177.

31. See p. 29. Ilyenkov also discusses the understanding of the ideal in terms of 'cybernetics, information theory and other physical-mathematical and technical disciplines'. According to such an approach, the ideal 'begins to appear as a certain type of "code", as a result of "coding" and "decoding", converting some "signals" into other "signals" ...'. For Ilyenkov, such 'purely physical phenomena, which are in one way or another related by the interconnection of one material system with another material

of the ideal is dependent upon conscious human beings. According to Ilyenkov, it would be *'absurd to speak of any "ideal" without man'*, yet this does not mean that it is to be 'found in the head'.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the ideal is of our creation and clearly also something impalpable.

Thus, it is not the existence of the ideal that is in doubt, but rather its objectiveness. In other words, we might ask: where might we touch or see the ideal? The answer being: nowhere. And yet one is conscious of its presence. How, then, can something that is sensuously imperceptible be also objective? The answer Ilyenkov provides is that the ideal is objective and, moreover, part of our objective reality, *since* it is something that is being objectified – or materialised – in our various activities. The notion of 'objectification' (or 'reification', 'materialisation' or 'alienation') seems to imply that something originally non-objective becomes 'objectified'. Perhaps it is our thoughts that are being objectified. Then, at least the origin of the ideal is in the mental sphere. But this is exactly what Ilyenkov denies. The question then becomes: what is the relation between our thoughts and reality? This question cannot be avoided and Ilyenkov duly takes up the challenge.

In his *Dialectical Logic*, Ilyenkov treats the question of the interrelations of thought and being, our ideas and the external world. The book can also be read as a history of the concept of the ideal. In his first essay on 'The Problem of the Subject Matter and Sources of Logic', Ilyenkov poses the following question:

[I]n what are such objects as 'concept' ('idea') and 'thing' related? In what special 'space' can they be contrasted, compared and differentiated. Is there, in general, a 'third' thing in which they are 'one and the same' in spite of all their directly visible differences?<sup>33</sup>

This is one formulation for the traditional epistemological question regarding our possibility of gaining truthful knowledge of the world. Only things of the same kind can be compared, thus it seems hopeless to try to confirm whether my idea of a thing corresponds with the thing itself. Am I destined always to 'compare an idea of a thing with the *thing as an object of consciousness*, that is, not with the thing but with another idea of it'?<sup>34</sup> Is there any third mediating term or factor that would somehow free us from the supposed prison of our consciousness?

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system' cannot provide an apt basis for understanding the nature of the ideal (see p. 38). This seems interesting in regard to Eco's semiotic theory that builds on the notion of a code (see above).

32. See p. 40 – original emphasis.

33. Ilyenkov 1977, p. 18.

34. Ilyenkov 1997, p. 7.

In *Dialectical Logic* Ilyenkov investigates the thought of several philosophers, from Spinoza onwards, from the point of view of this question. Immanuel Kant finds the third term from the space of representation. Once the thing has been transformed into a representation, it can be compared to another representation. Still, the things in themselves remain unknown. We have seen that the encyclopedia of Eco remains in the realm of representation and is, as such, a Kantian construction, although Eco does not, of course, believe in any *a priori* categorisations. As a sphere of interrelated representations, the concept of encyclopedia leaves open the question of reference and the relationship of our representations to the surrounding world. How, then, could our thoughts, or representations, ever get a hold on reality?

An answer starts to take shape, as Ilyenkov points out, in the thinking of the German idealists.<sup>35</sup> What if the thing in itself was a product of our consciousness? In Hegel, this insight is already found in its full-fledged form. The thing in itself is not alien to our thought, since a thing for us and a thing in itself are moments of the same substance – Spirit. In Hegel's analysis, the ideal plays the decisive part. Spirit posits its 'other', the material objective world, and reaches its self-consciousness in a 'dialectical transformation of the ideal into the material and vice versa'.<sup>36</sup> But in absolutising the ideal in this way, as self-evolving Spirit, Hegel's idealism is left without a means to explain the possibility of thought itself.<sup>37</sup>

For Marx, too, the (collective) subject realises itself by way of objectification, but for him the material world is primary. 'Prior to contemplation', writes Ilyenkov, 'the man acts practically with real things, and in the process of this activity all his representations are formed'.<sup>38</sup> The ideality is founded upon social consciousness, which is materialised in the man-made culture and environment, in humanised nature. Things – or, better, our human environment – owe their manifested ideality to the sensuous human aim-oriented activity (or labour), which is inherently collective. The objective sphere of the meanings, or the significance of things, becomes constructed in the labour process whereby a human being moulds her natural environment. The seeming gap between consciousness and the real world becomes bridged, because in actual fact there was never

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35. It is interesting that Ilyenkov appreciates much more idealists like Plato and Hegel than those whom he calls the 'silly' materialists, who attempt to find the 'ideal' from 'the bulk of the nerve fabric of the cerebral cortex'; see p. 75. Hegel understood 'the dialectical transformation of the ideal into the material and vice versa, which was never even suspected by metaphysical "silly" materialism, which remained stuck in crude, non-dialectical oppositions'; p. 44.

36. See p. 44.

37. See Bakhurst 1991, p. 213.

38. Ilyenkov 1997, p. 29.

any such gap. And this is not achieved by losing the otherness of the material world into thought, as happens in Hegel's system. Quite the contrary: it is exactly the otherness of the material world that makes thought possible, since in the process of moulding her material, social and cultural environment, the human being (understood broadly also as a community of human individuals) becomes conscious of the world and herself. In the process of creating her environment a human being creates herself too – as she becomes an able inhabitant of the world that is also of her own creation.

Thus, the ideal, according to Ilyenkov, is not dependent upon the mental for its existence. And the mental itself is social in origin, which is explained by the notion of *internalisation*. In the course of her upbringing and education, the human child internalises the norms, patterns and meanings of the surrounding culture.<sup>39</sup> Consciousness and will awaken in the individual as she finds herself confronted by the *materially established spiritual culture* of humanity.<sup>40</sup> The specific forms of human activity follow rules and patterns, which for the most part do not have any genetic background, and because of this an individual is compelled to distinguish herself from her organic body. An individual gains – through the ideal reified in the forms of collective labour – an outside perspective on oneself, without which neither self-consciousness nor will would be possible. In this way the ideal is something external, collective and objective from the point of view of an individual, even though she has herself been formed by it in becoming a member of a human society.

#### 4. Semiosis as the becoming of the ideal

After the preceding exposition, one may ask what Umberto Eco's idealistic vision of the self-sufficient semantic/semiotic universe has to do with Ilyenkov's materialistic conception of the ideal. The answer is that both Eco and Ilyenkov set out to solve the problem of culturally constructed meanings. And their basic insight is the same: meanings, or the ideal, are objective phenomena whose explanation has no need of any recourse to mental phenomena. Quite the contrary: mental phenomena should be explained with the help of intersubjective meanings, which are embodied in material things. Eco thinks that with the help of the interpretants, which are always materialised in some sign-vehicle, the meaningfulness of the cultural world can be approached in an empirically

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39. L.S. Vygotsky argued that 'the higher mental faculties' of humans are internalised forms of social interaction. Thought and language are developed concurrently as the child, during her upbringing, internalises language that she initially recognises as an external tool; see Vygotsky 1962 and 1991.

40. Ilyenkov 1997, p. 81.

verifiable manner. Furthermore, for Eco, 'the subject of any semiotic enquiry' is nothing more than 'the historical and social result of the world that a survey on Semantic Space [the encyclopedia] makes available'.<sup>41</sup> This comes close to the view of Marx, who in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* writes: 'We see how the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open book* of *man's essential powers*, the exposure to the senses of human psychology... in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*'.<sup>42</sup> Yet Eco ends up sketching the signifying system as 'an autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the sphere of meanings becomes detached from its material embodiment in our actions and things – despite Eco's stated intentions.

In addition to the problem of the ontological status of his encyclopedia, Eco has a further problem in not being able to explain how the individual performances become part of the collective knowledge. Time and again Eco invokes the notion of convention in his attempt to describe how the individual creation is dependent upon the social, but it seems to not work so well the other way around. Eventually, following a complicated analysis of the different forms of sign production, Eco simply asserts that, in the end, some of the innovations become 'publicly accepted'.

It seems to me that these problems within Eco's semiotics are interrelated. In focusing on the culturally constructed artefacts and the supposed meaning units attached to them, Eco loses sight of the *social* production process, that is, the activities in which these artefacts are created. These activities are historical and local, and only in their context can the created meanings and competences be explained. Actually, there are no such things as meanings existing independently of our life-activities. Meanings are produced and reproduced, again and again, in the processes of our varied activities – such is the life of *semiosis*, the process of meaning-making and meaning-engendering. No separate system of significations needs to be postulated because it is precisely our shared labour, the social activity, which carries them.<sup>44</sup>

However, there is a strong temptation to hypostatise meanings and treat them in an idealistic manner, as something thing-like in themselves. The germ of this kind of thinking can also be found occasionally in Ilyenkov's texts. Repeatedly,

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41. Eco 1976, p. 315.

42. Marx 1964, p. 142.

43. Eco 1976, p. 9.

44. If one directs attention away from the signifying systems toward signifying activities, the Peircean notion of 'habit' might provide a more fruitful starting point than the notion of 'convention'. This is because, for Peirce, the habit is something directed toward action.

he writes of ideality as if it *represented* activity or its results, as if it were a kind of spiritual or non-material ‘image’, ‘stamp’ or ‘form’ laid on natural physical material or objects in labour process.<sup>45</sup> When writing about the ideal as an ‘image’, Ilyenkov comes close to characterising the ideal as some kind of (mental or other) representation. Thus, according to Ilyenkov, ideality can be found in the relationship of representation where ‘one sensuously perceived thing, while remaining itself, performs the role or function of representing quite another thing (to be even more precise, it represents the universal nature of that other thing, that is, something “other” which in sensuous, corporeal terms is quite unlike it), and in this way acquires a new plane of existence’.<sup>46</sup> This reminds one of the traditional, and by today’s standards somewhat obsolete, definition of representation as that of something *standing for* something else.

However, in the end, approaching the ideal as a representation of some kind can be more deceptive than enlightening. For sure, it cannot be any mental representation without losing its distinctiveness, but it cannot be any material representation either. ‘A person cannot pass the ideal as such to another person’, Ilyenkov claims. ‘One can observe the activity of a painter or an engineer as long as one likes, striving to catch their mode of action... but one can thus only copy the external techniques and methods of their work but never the ideal image itself, the active faculty itself. The ideal... is only masterable through active operation with the object’.<sup>47</sup> It therefore seems fair to say that the ideal *dwells* in the relationship of representation, but that this relationship is always in a state of becoming. It seems that the ideal is something fluid, flowing in the continuous stream of semiosis understood as practical activity, where the meaning is constantly changing to its other.

Since the ideal is in continuous movement, then, strictly speaking, ideality is not a property of any individual thing. Specifically, it is not a property of a thing in the same way as the physical properties of a thing. Allow the activity which carries the thing to die out, and even the memory of it fades away, leaving nothing of the original ideality of the thing. But this should not lead us to think that the ideal forms a sphere of its own, or that it is involved only in certain kind of representations. For instance, Peter E. Jones claims that ideal forms are derived ‘images’ of material objects and processes, making the ideal the property of words and symbols.<sup>48</sup> This seems to me contrary to Ilyenkov’s intention. Firstly, words and symbols as artefacts are not very different from other semiotic

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45. See Ilyenkov 1977, p. 253, p. 256, pp. 280–2.

46. See p. 55.

47. Ilyenkov 1977, p. 281.

48. See Jones 1999. This comes close to the view of many philosophers of science who think that mathematical models – as formal symbolic constructions – are ideal, while scale models are material; see Knuuttila 2005 and 2011.

devices, or other man-made things (such as tools, for example). All of them make use of a material medium to convey some meaning. Thus, words, symbols and diverse other representations are not privileged carriers of the ideal or significance. Ilyenkov is very clear on this point: apart from speech and language, the ideal is also manifested 'in drawings, models and such symbolic objects as coats of arms, banners, forms of dress, utensils and so on'.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, the occasional attempts to make language somehow secondary to the practical tool-using activity seem to perpetuate the same tricky distinction between our thoughts/representations and the reality that dialectical thinking actually tries to evade. Trying to discern which events or things are primary – or whether, in particular, it was tools or signs that 'came first' – seems futile. Any 'first' genuine tool had to carry along an elementary sign-function too. Otherwise it could not have been recognised as a tool of its kind and would not have preserved its function through continued activity.<sup>50</sup>

If the ideal cannot be regarded as a property of a thing, might it be considered a property of the world, as Bakhurst, amongst others, claims? The answer depends upon how we conceive of the world. According to Bakhurst, Ilyenkov's notion of the ideal involves a wholesale idealisation of the natural world: 'Through social forms of human activity man endows his natural environment with enduring significance and value, thus creating a realm of ideal properties and relations'.<sup>51</sup> This step easily leads one to think of the ideal, or the sphere of meanings, as a world of its own, which can be approached as a huge book of our civilisation, as a veritable encyclopedia, ready for reading. We can find the symptom of this shift in the way Bakhurst uses the metaphor of writing when trying to explain the idealisation of nature by human activity. 'There is nothing mystical in this, he [Ilyenkov] insists, for ideal phenomena owe this objective existence to human beings... In the course of the transformation of nature by human action, meaning and value are *written* into nature'.<sup>52</sup> This comes close to seeing the ideal as some kind of extra layer imprinted upon the world. This vision easily leads to the conclusion that the ideal is especially prone to be represented by linguistic and symbolic means. Once again, we see how a dividing line emerges, separating the discursive realm from practical and material activity, even though the concept of the ideal strives to overcome this kind of borderline.

Consequently, Ilyenkov's 'insight about artefacts', as Bakhurst puts it, should not be interpreted in terms of the artefacts having both material and ideal 'form' –

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49. See p. 49.

50. In general, the theoretical narratives of origin should not usually be interpreted as histories. The historical event or order is most often derived from a theoretical structure of some kind, consciously or not consciously subscribed. For example, see Culler 1986.

51. Bakhurst 1988, p. 37; see also Bakhurst 1991, pp. 186–9.

52. Bakhurst 1995, p. 160, my italics.

the latter essentially symbolic or linguistic in nature – which ‘insight’ could then be generalised to the whole of nature. In my opinion, there is no need to say that we live in a humanised world – it is merely a metaphor – instead of living in the material world. This one and only world we inhabit has been and continues to be changed by our activities, and while living in it we are also trying to make sense of it, and of ourselves as a part of it. I wonder how revealing it is to claim that we humans relate ourselves to a humanised nature as a *whole*. Do we ever *experience* nature or our environment as a totality, and why should this supposed totality (nature) even be duplicated? We simply do not seem to act and perceive in this way. Instead, we work in our environment in a piecemeal fashion trying to achieve our goals, and to make sense out of it by whatever means are close at hand. The ideal dwells in this continuous labour of intervening, moulding and interpretation; a process that leaves traces of itself in our environment. Thus, in addition to the ‘insight about artefacts’, the semiotic insight about interpretants is also important as the two are intertwined in our social activities. Moreover, the insight about interpretants serves to underline that we can never completely capture meaning. It always flies ahead of us.

Of course, Bakhurst’s interpretation of Ilyenkov does not overlook this incessant movement of the ideal. He stresses how ‘the ideal exists as a moment of the constant interchange between acting subject and environment’.<sup>53</sup> Yet one finds both from the writings of Ilyenkov, as well as from Bakhurst’s readings of it, an occasional tension between the ideal as a property of a thing and the ideal as movement. And the same kind of tension can be found in the semiotic theory of Eco. Behind this kind of internally conflicting theorising about meaning, there seems to lie a vision of the world as a huge cluster of things endowed with steady properties, ideal and otherwise. Our use of language seems to perpetuate this kind of essentialist thinking, even if we find the essentialist idiom unsuitable for the phenomenon we strive to describe. Ilyenkov writes:

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man, as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man’s dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. ‘Ideality’ as such exists only in the constant transformation of these two forms of its ‘external incarnation’ and does not coincide with either of them taken separately.... *Try to identify the ‘ideal’ with any one of these two forms of its immediate existence – and it no longer exists.*<sup>54</sup>

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53. Bakhurst 1991, p. 184.

54. See pp. 77–78 – italics added.



This is an apt characterisation of semiosis as well. The last sentence of the quotation is especially important. Doing justice to Ilyenkov's writings on the ideal amounts to understanding that his efforts to explicate 'the ideal' were due to the evasiveness of the phenomenon he was trying to capture.

## 5. Epilogue: From culture to the multitude of practices

Ilyenkov approached the ideal primarily in terms of the value-form, which in his view is completely ideal in that it is distinct from the 'tangible-corporeal form of the commodity in which it appears'.<sup>55</sup> Yet what applies to value-form also applies more generally to meaning. In this essay I have attempted to tease out the semiotic potential of Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal by reading him alongside Umberto Eco. Apart from the fact that one can find considerable common ground between Eco's semiotic theory and Ilyenkov's theorising of the ideal, they both also provide fruitful perspectives toward one another. I have argued that Eco's semiotics fails to deal adequately with sign-production since his theory lacks the dimension of social activity – something that becomes especially clear if his views are contrasted with those of Ilyenkov. On the other hand, at times Ilyenkov casts the ideal in terms of representation as *standing for*, which as a static conception does not really capture the metamorphoses of the ideal. The way Eco approaches semiosis as a sequence of interpretants is more enlightening in this respect, especially as he considers interpretants as collective, public and empirically detectable.

Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*, and Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic* and 'Dialectics of the Ideal', were written contemporaneously. In his subsequent work, Eco has further developed the idea of the encyclopedia culminating in the treatise *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*. This book is, in many ways, a companion piece to *A Theory of Semiotics*, as Eco also points out. In *Kant and the Platypus*, Eco finally attempts to relate the encyclopedia to reality by asking how reality constrains and resists semiosis.<sup>56</sup> However, the direction he takes is not toward social activity, but rather to questions concerning perception and cognition. To be sure, there is a way back from cognitive science to the perspective of Ilyenkov, and the activity theory in general. This return is provided by the idea of *extended cognition* or *distributed cognition*,<sup>57</sup> but Eco does not go so far.

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55. See p. 43.

56. See also Eco 1990.

57. See, for example, Clark 2008 and Hutchins 2011.

Ilyenkov, in turn, unfortunately died some years after his work on the ideal was published. However, the idea of the interrelationship of the ideal and social labour lives on, for instance, in social semiotics and semiotically oriented science and technology studies. A couple of scholars deserve special mention in this regard: Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen study meaning-making in terms of social practices in which signs are produced by making use of various material media and semiotic modes.<sup>58</sup> The social construction of technology (SCOT) movement studies how human practices shape technology: the meanings and uses of technological artefacts are flexible and changing.<sup>59</sup> However, the grand cultural-historical vision of Evald Ilyenkov and Umberto Eco has disappeared from these discourses, as the focus is now on the multitude of signifying practices and the aims of various social groups.

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58. For example, see Kress and van Leeuwen 2001.

59. For example, see Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1987.



# Evald Ilyenkov's Dialectics of Abstract and Concrete and the Recent Value-Form Debate

Vesa Oittinen and Paula Rauhala

## Introduction

The first book Evald Ilyenkov published was the 1960 work, *Dialektika abstraktnogo i konkretnogo v 'Kapitale' Marksa* (*The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*). It has since been translated into several languages,<sup>1</sup> and in 1965 Ilyenkov received the esteemed Chernyshevsky Prize for the book. Despite the renown the book received upon its eventual release, there were many obstacles on the way to its publication. The original manuscript was prepared back in 1956, but because it seemed to contain too many controversial assertions which deviated from the standard Diamat view on how Marxist philosophy should be interpreted, it disappeared into the desk-drawer of the then all-powerful academician Pyotr Fedoseev (1908–1990). At the time, Fedoseev was not only the director of the Philosophical Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, but also one of the top ideology bureaucrats of the country.

After two years of pleas, consultations and a seemingly never-ending rally of expert statements (all-in-all there were over ten different assessments given), in 1958 Ilyenkov finally consented to edit the manuscript

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1. The English translation by Sergei Kuzyakov is even available in electronic form at the following web address: [www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm). For translations in other languages, see the bibliographies published in this volume and by Bakhurst 1991 and in the Ilyenkov web-page hosted by Andrey Maidansky: <http://caute.ru/ilyenkov/eng/index.htm>.

radically and shorten it by almost half. As A.G. Novokhatko writes, the book that finally managed to get published was

essentially, a new variant . . . The passages concerning history of philosophy were removed, because most of the assertions and judgements which the evaluators of the manuscript . . . regarded as unacceptable or just controversial, were found in them. In the new version of the book almost all the fragments were removed, which dealt with the relationships between dialectics and formal logic . . . All this resulted to a substantial attenuation of the thematics of the book.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, this editing led Ilyenkov to change the title of the work. The original rubric *The Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Thought* had echoed Ilyenkov's ambitious project to re-interpret the core ideas of Marxist philosophy, but now he had to accept a more humble domain in which to test his views, namely how the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete was applied in Marx's *chef-d'oeuvre*. Ilyenkov's original manuscript was published in its entirety much later, indeed after the demise of the Soviet Union, in 1997. It was edited by Aleksandr Novokhatko, the administrator of the Ilyenkov archive.

### Key ideas in Ilyenkov's book

Comparing the book published in 1960 to the complete edition of 1997, one can feel relieved that the re-editing of the original manuscript, as stark as it was, did not erase Ilyenkov's main theoretical message. One of the leading ideas throughout his career as a philosopher was already present here, namely that in the philosophy of Marxism there cannot be different domains for ontology and gnoseology. This was a serious challenge to the dogmas of the received Diamat, since it implied – and Ilyenkov was cautious enough not to explicitly present all the consequences of his thesis – that Marxist philosophy cannot be neatly divided in dialectical materialism on the one side, whose task is to inquire into the 'general laws' of Being, and historical materialism on the other side, studying human society and human practice. Rather, they merge into a single 'science' whose business is to examine how the objective forms of external reality come to coincide with human subjectivity. Ilyenkov's famous doctrine of the ideal is a consequence of this approach. The ideal is not something merely subjective, but has, as it were, an 'objective' existence in the forms of the activity, culture and social institutions created by human beings.

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2. Novokhatko 1997, p. 4.

Ilyenkov supports his interpretation by citing a dictum of Lenin, the canonical figure of Soviet Diamat. In his *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin tried to analyse Hegel's *Science of Logics* in order to bolster the philosophical foundations of Marxism, which the theoreticians of the Second International had tried to interpret either in the light of (Neo-)Kantianism, or (perhaps even worse) as a variant of evolutionism in the positivistic sense. In Lenin's notes we find the famous and often-cited passage: 'If Marx did not leave behind him a *'Logic'* (with a capital letter), he did leave the *logic* of *Capital*, and this ought to be utilised to the full in this question'. Immediately after these words, Lenin continued:

In *Capital*, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism (three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing) which has taken everything valuable in Hegel and developed it further.<sup>3</sup>

This passage and others like it in Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, although seldom cited provided Ilyenkov with the support he needed for his re-interpretation of Marxist dialectics. At the same time, it became more difficult for his adversaries in the Soviet philosophical establishment to play down the theses he put forward. However, it is evident that the references to Lenin served not merely a precautionary role for Ilyenkov. Several testimonies from his contemporaries make clear that he was convinced to represent the 'genuine Leninist position' in the questions of Marxist philosophy – that is, not Ilyenkov but rather the Party philosophers actually represented the deviant and aberrant points of view.

In any case, in *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's 'Capital'* (henceforth *DAC*), Ilyenkov stresses that it is just the identity of dialectics, logics and theory of cognition, which characterises the true Marxian method of 'ascending from the abstract into the concrete'. At the same time, this method, although initially developed by Hegel, is quite contrary to the method of Hegel. Whilst the road from the abstract to the concrete was, for Hegel, 'a method of *creation*' of the concrete, for Marx it is

merely a method of *reflection* of concrete reality in thought... In other words, the discussion of the mode of logical activity here, too, becomes the study of the *objective nature of the objective reality*, a further elaboration of the category of concreteness as an *objective* category expressing the universal form of the existence of reality. Here, too, the principle of coincidence of logic, epistemology, and dialectics is the dominant one: a question that is purely logical at first

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3. Lenin 1976, p. 317.

sight is essentially a question of universal forms in which objective concreteness emerges and develops.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the dialectical view (unlike that of the metaphysical or empirical) on the universal does not regard the universal as a mere logical abstraction, but as an 'objective concreteness'. According to Ilyenkov, Marx proceeded exactly in this manner:

When Marx set himself the task of revealing the universal law of capitalism as such, as a historically determined system of social production, he did not take the path of inductive comparison of all cases, without exception, of capitalist development that took place on the planet in his time. He acted differently, as a dialectician: he took the *most characteristic* and *best developed case*, namely capitalist reality in England and its reflection in English economic literature and worked out a *universal* economic theory.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the third chapter of *DAC*, Ilyenkov attempts to shed light on the question of methodology by looking at the history of political economy. According to him, Adam Smith was led in his inquiries by an insufficient method based upon the empiricism and 'nominalism' of Locke. 'Through Locke, political economy assimilated the basic methodological principles of empiricism, in particular and especially the one-sided analytical and inductive method, the standpoint of the reduction of complex phenomena to their elementary constituents'.<sup>6</sup> The inadequacy of the empiricist approach became especially obvious in the attempts of classical political economy to explain precisely what formed the substance of wealth. In what did wealth consist?

This conception of substance, just as in natural science, could not be obtained through empirical induction. But Lockean epistemology was silent on just this point – on the question of the ways of cognition of substance, of the ways of formation of the universal original foundation of science. This foundation, the conception of the substance of wealth, had to be worked out by economists (Locke included) in a purely spontaneous way, without a clear understanding of the ways of obtaining it. However it may be, English political economy practically solved this difficulty when William Petty discovered this universal substance of economic phenomena, the substance of wealth, in *labour producing commodities*, in labour performed with the objective of alienating the product of labour in the free market.<sup>7</sup>

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4. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 169.

5. Ilyenkov 1982, pp. 172–3.

6. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 179.

7. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 181.

Of all the classical political economists, Ricardo receives the most praise from Ilyenkov. Ricardo's 'view of the nature of scientific inquiry is much more reminiscent of Spinoza's method than the epistemology of the empiricist Locke; he consistently adheres to the substantive standpoint'.<sup>8</sup> This evaluation may sound somewhat astonishing as it pairs Ricardo with Spinoza, but it is not without its reasons, as we shall soon see. Ilyenkov continues his praise of Ricardo, noting that he 'wants to deduce any particular, specific form of relations of production and distribution of wealth out of the labour theory of value, out of a theory expressing the universal substance, the real essence of all economic phenomena. This desire of Ricardo is his absolute merit as a theoretician'.<sup>9</sup> However, the central fault of Ricardo lies in his methodology, which is empiricist and nominalistic in the sense that abstractions are nothing but subjective generalisations; only concrete phenomena have a real existence:

According to Ricardo, value as such can only exist *post rem*, only as a mental abstraction from the particular kinds of value (profit, rent, wages, etc.), by no means *ante rem*, as an independent reality chronologically preceding its particular species (capital, profit, rent, wages, etc.). All these particular species of value eternally exist side by side with one another and by no means originate in value, just as the horse does not actually derive from the animal in general.<sup>10</sup>

Actually, for Marx, '[v]alue is a real, objective condition without which neither capital nor money nor anything else is possible'. And, if this is the case, 'value as the starting point of theoretical conception should be understood in science as an objective economic reality emerging and existing before such phenomena as profit, capital, wages, rent, etc., can emerge and exist'. Therefore, 'theoretical definitions of value as such can only be obtained by considering a certain objective economic reality capable of existing before, outside, and independently of all those phenomena that later developed on its basis'.<sup>11</sup>

For Ilyenkov, value, although ideal, is something which nevertheless exists – as the Schoolmen said – *ante rem*, that is, independently and outside of the cognising subject. (As the Scholastic terms do not always describe accurately the intentions of modern philosophy, it should maybe be added that, for Ilyenkov, the ideas exist *ante rem* only in the meaning '*non solum in intellectu*'.) The concrete manifestations of value – such as profit, salary, capital, and so on – cannot be explained before we have the general concept of value.

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8. Ilyenkov 1982, pp. 182–3.

9. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 187.

10. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 196.

11. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 198.



Of course, Ilyenkov knows Hegel's famous joke – in the causerie *Who Thinks Abstractly?* – about the sick man who asks his friends to bring him fruits. When they arrive with apples, pears, cherries and so on, he rejects them, crying: 'Did you not understand me? I wanted *fruits!*' That is why Ilyenkov hastens to clarify that he does not mean the *ante rem* existence of value to be understood in a manner Hegel is criticizing here. Rather, he means that all these concrete forms of value had a historical predecessor in value, as if in their embryonic form. The same applies, according to Ilyenkov, to the animal and plant species:

The horse and the cow did not of course descend from the animal in general, just as the pear and the apple are not products of self-alienation of the concept of fruit in general. But the cow and the horse undoubtedly had a common ancestor in the remote past epochs, while the apple and the pear are also products of differentiation of a form of fruit common to both of them. This actual common ancestor of the cow, the horse, the hare, the fox and all the other now existing species of animals did not of course exist in divine reason, as an idea of the animal in general, but in nature itself, as a quite real particular species, from which divers other species descended through differentiation. This universal form of animal, animal as such, if you wish, is by no means an abstraction comprising in itself only that feature which is common to all the now existing particular species of animals. This universal was at the same time a particular species possessing not only and not so much those traits that were preserved in all the descendants as features common to them all, but also its own specific features, partly inherited by the descendants, partly entirely lost.<sup>12</sup>

As to value, what could this 'ancestral form', the 'concrete universal' from which it stems, actually be? According to Ilyenkov, it is the '*fact of simple commodity exchange*',<sup>13</sup> discovered already by such early economists as William Petty. This fact is the most simple and primordial both in a historical and a logical sense, and it fulfils the requirements Marx posed for a definition of a 'concretely universal' concept. Such definitions 'express that real (rather than formal) general moment which constitutes the elementary, "generic" essence of all the other particular categories':

The cardinal difference between Marxian analysis of value as the universal basis for all the other categories of capitalist economy, and that kind of analysis which was attained in bourgeois political economy, lay precisely in the fact that Marx formed scientific definitions of 'value in general', 'value as such',

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12. Ilyenkov 1982, pp. 199–200.

13. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 78, original emphasis.

on the basis of concrete consideration of direct exchange of one commodity for another involving no money. In doing so, Marx made a strict abstraction from all the other kinds of value developed on this basis (surplus-value, profit, rent, interest, and so on). Ricardo's main error, according to Marx, lay in his inability 'to forget profit' in considering 'value as such', so that his abstraction turns out to be incomplete, insufficient, 'formal'.<sup>14</sup>

What Ilyenkov here describes as characteristic for Marx's 'concretely universal' definitions, he had later and in another context found already in Spinoza. In *Dialectical Logic*, Ilyenkov writes of how Spinoza had in the *Tractatus* insisted upon the scientific importance of the so-called genetic definitions. Taking his examples from geometry, Spinoza asserted that if we define the circle as a figure, in which all the lines drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal, we have only a formal definition of the circle, a definition that mentions only one of the circle's properties. By contrast, if we define the circle as a figure drawn by a line whose one end is fixed while the other moves, we have here given a genetic definition of the circle. Such a definition shows the *causa proxima* of the circle by indicating how it can be constructed. At the same time, it unites the concrete (the constructing of one concrete circle) with the universal (it shows how all circles are produced, that is, gives the essence of the circle). It is obvious that Ilyenkov here sees an analogy between Marx's 'concretely universal' definitions and Spinoza's genetic definition (although the latter by no means belongs only to Spinoza). In every case, as presented in *Dialectical Logic*, Spinoza's solution is seen as paradigmatic for Marxism too.

In the published works of Ilyenkov, there are very few references to the discussions among the economists. However, his views on the methodology of Marx's *Capital* have a direct relevance to the present-day economic debates. One of the most important problems discussed today concerns the nature of abstraction in Marx's *Capital* and how this finds its expression in Marx's doctrine of value. How should such concepts – introduced in the first chapter of *Capital* as 'substance of value' and 'abstract labour' – be interpreted? These questions have recently been posed by the so-called 'value-form' approach. Given its contemporary influence, it is worth examining the value-form debates in relation to Ilyenkov's work in order to see how the latter may contribute something to the former.

## Ilyenkov's *DAC* and the value-form debate

There are different value-form theories, but what we call here the value-form approach includes authors who underestimate the quantitative side of the

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14. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 79.

theory of value and question abstract labour as the substance of value.<sup>15</sup> It is typical for these interpretations to bind the category of abstract labour to exchange and money, in turn rejecting the materiality of abstract labour. The substance of value has been re-interpreted as a reduction taking place in the market, through money, and its definition as 'a productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscles'<sup>16</sup> is rejected.<sup>17</sup>

These views are common among the authors from the Rubin School,<sup>18</sup> the monetary theory of value of the German New Marx-reading,<sup>19</sup> and the so-called New Dialectics.<sup>20</sup> In the Anglophone world, the debate started in the 1970s through the writings of Geoff Pilling, Ira Gerstein, Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun, among others.<sup>21</sup> More recently, it has been promoted by proponents of New Dialectics such as Geert Reuten, Patrick Murray and Chris Arthur.<sup>22</sup>

The motivation for these interpretations in the Anglophone world can be traced back to the insufficiencies of traditional Marxism and to the neo-Ricardian attack on value theory. Against the physicalist reading of the latter, these new interpretations stress the historical specificity of value and its special social form.<sup>23</sup> These reflections have also been inspired by the works of Soviet economist Isaak Ilich Rubin, whose works were rediscovered in the West during the 1970s.

By denying the physical reality of abstract labour, the value-form approach has re-interpreted it as a category belonging to the sphere of circulation. For this reason, the critics of this approach have called it 'circulationist', since it over-emphasises the role of money, exchange and the first chapters of *Capital*.<sup>24</sup> As Andrew Kliman and Ted McGlone have noted, in these discussions, Marx's use of the terms 'abstract' and 'concrete' in *Capital* – that is, 'concrete' meaning a complex unity of diverse elements, and 'abstract', in turn, something which is separated from this complex unity – has been disregarded. Often, 'concrete labour' is construed as 'the work that workers actually do', while 'abstract labour' is seen

15. Likitkijsoomboon 1995, p. 84.

16. Marx 1962, p. 58.

17. Carchedi 2009, p. 154.

18. However, Mavroudeas claims that this means misappropriating Rubin's name; see Mavroudeas 2004, p. 181.

19. In German, the term is '*Neue Marx-Lektüre*'.

20. Kincaid estimates that no one has yet produced a sustained examination of the connections between the Anglophone 'new dialectics' and German work on the logical construction of *Capital* by Helmut Reichelt, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Michael Heinrich; see Kincaid 2008, p. 409.

21. Likitkijsoomboon 1995, p. 73. Pilling 1980 discusses the ideality of value-form referring to Ilyenkov.

22. For other perspectives stressing the determination of value as a social form, see Kicillof and Starosta 2007b, p. 14.

23. Callinicos 2005, p. 42; Kicillof and Starosta 2007a, p. 9; Kicillof and Starosta 2007b, p. 14.

24. Mavroudeas 2004, p. 190; Hanloser and Reitter 2008, p. 12.

as something entirely else.<sup>25</sup> We believe that Ilyenkov's *DAC* might contribute to the debate not only because the nature of abstraction and the relationship of the abstract and the concrete in Marx's method are its major themes, but also because the value-form approach – despite obvious differences – seems to have some similar aims with Ilyenkov's interpretation of Marx.

In his 2002 book *The Value of Marx*, Alfredo Saad-Filho critically examined the views of the New Dialectics from the perspective of Ilyenkov's materialist dialectics. Saad-Filho's analysis shows pronounced differences between these approaches, such as Ilyenkov's conscious historicism, which contrasts to the point of view of New Dialectics, which denies that the study of historical development can contribute to the analysis and thinks that the historical passages in *Capital* serve only as illustrations to the theoretical presentation.<sup>26</sup>

In reviewing Saad-Filho's book, Fred Moseley finds this 'rare emphasis by a Marxian economist on the philosophical issues of Marx's logical method' especially important. He praises Saad-Filho for 'introducing Ilyenkov's distinctive and very interesting interpretation of Marx's method to English readers'.<sup>27</sup> We naturally agree with Moseley also in that Ilyenkov is an important theoretician worth of further study.<sup>28</sup>

Andrew Brown also applies Ilyenkov's ideas insightfully in criticizing the value-theoretical views of the New Dialectics.<sup>29</sup> Both Brown and Saad-Filho concentrate on the value-form debate in the Anglophone world, but there has been a similar and intensive debate in Germany. Actually, the Anglophone discussion was influenced by Hans-Georg Backhaus's pioneering work from the 1960s, which was a key contribution to the West-German current called 'Capital Logic', later named 'New Marx Reading'.<sup>30</sup>

This intensive preoccupation with Marx's method, the nature of value and the logic of *Capital* dates back to the student movement of the 1960s. In this academic type of reading, which has generally kept a distance from the everyday practice of the labour-movement, most attention was paid to Marx's critique of political economy, especially to its methodological side.<sup>31</sup> The reading was and remains especially critical of Friedrich Engels's 'historicist' understanding. A central target is Engels's claim of the existence of simple commodity-production, which he presented in the afterword for the third volume of *Capital*. According to the proponents of New Marx Reading, Engels believed that the object of Marx's

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25. Kliman and McGlone 2004, p. 135.

26. Saad-Filho 2002, p. 17.

27. Moseley 2003, p. 210.

28. Moseley 2003, p. 212.

29. Brown 2008.

30. See Backhaus 2011, p. 9.

31. Elbe 2008, p. 30ff.

analysis in the first chapters of *Capital* was simple commodity-production, which historically precedes capitalist production-relations.<sup>32</sup>

In the second part of Hans-Georg Backhaus's series of articles *Materialien zur Rekonstruktion der Marxschen Werttheorie*, written in 1975, Backhaus presents Marx's theory of value as a 'monetary theory' [*monetäre Werttheorie*]. He labels 'traditional Marxist' interpretations as variants of 'premonetary' theories alongside its bourgeois, subjectivist representatives.<sup>33</sup>

According to Backhaus, both of these 'premonetary' views deviate methodologically from Marx's dialectics. Both try to derive value from the 'natural basis' and money is not developed dialectically in inner connection with value.

Right at the beginning of this essay, Backhaus quotes Ilyenkov, presenting his reading as an archetype of a Marxist variant of the premonetary understanding: '[t]his elementary objective economic reality existed long before the emergence of capitalism . . . this reality is *direct exchange of one commodity for another commodity*'.<sup>34</sup>

Six years earlier, the third chapter of *DAC*, including these passages, had appeared alongside Backhaus's article *Zur Dialektik der Wertform* (On the Dialectic of the Value-Form) in Alfred Schmidt's 1969 collection of essays *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, which played an important role in the emergence of this current. This fragment of *DAC* – not much more of Ilyenkov's book was at this time available in German<sup>35</sup> – inspired Backhaus to present his reading, which he declared as properly dialectical, expressly against Ilyenkov's views. Even if both authors share a special interest in dialectics and Marx's early economic manuscripts, they have evidently different understandings of the status of logical and historical material in Marx's analysis. Anyhow, Backhaus seems later to have mitigated his verdict; in the 1997 essay 'Zur Logischen Misere der Nationalökonomie', he even recommends Ilyenkov's book.<sup>36</sup> Ilyenkov, too, showed some interest in Backhaus's work. He translated Backhaus's above-mentioned article into Russian with the title 'K dialektike formy stoimosti', though it remained unpublished in his archives.<sup>37</sup> He seems not have made any further judgements concerning Backhaus's views.

In the same manner as Backhaus's work inspired a kind of 'Marxian renaissance' in West Germany, so did Ilyenkov's *DAC* in the USSR. These works

32. Hecker 1997, p. 119; Elbe 2008, p. 20.

33. Backhaus 2011, p. 93.

34. Backhaus 2011, p. 114; quoting Ilyenkov in Schmidt 1969 (2nd, identical ed. 1970), p. 124; Ilyenkov 1982, p. 198. Emphasis original.

35. The whole book was published in German only in 1979, with the title *Die Dialektik des Abstrakten und Konkreten im "Kapital" von Marx* (see References).

36. Backhaus 2011, p. 488.

37. Ilyenkov 2010, p. 35.

appeared at time when interest in the philosophical and methodological side of Marx's economic works was increasing in not only Western Marxism, but also in Soviet Marxism. Besides Ilyenkov's early work, in the Soviet Union were published other notable contributions, too, for example Merab Mamardashvili's short but influential article on the 'analysis of consciousness in Marx's works'<sup>38</sup> and Aleksandr Zinoviev's dissertation on the logics of Marx's *Capital* (written in 1954, but only published in book-form in 2002).<sup>39</sup>

The theoretical focus of the New Marx Reading has much in common with the line of tradition that Ilyenkov represents, the creative Soviet Marxism. For example, the question of the 'ascent from the abstract to the concrete' as a methodological principle of *Capital* and the problem of the starting point of the theoretical exposition were in the centre of the 1960s Western debate.<sup>40</sup> Ingo Elbe is thus quite right in noting, in his extensive history of the New Marx Reading, *Marx im Westen*, that while the academic interest of the student-movement in the West paid special attention to the philosophical side of Marx's critique of political economy, similar interest developed in the Eastern bloc. But although Elbe notes the Eastern-European interpretations of the method of Marx's *Capital* – besides Ilyenkov, Vitali Vygodski, Polish-born Roman Rosdolsky and Czech Jindřich Zelený are also mentioned – he dismisses them as developments of 'Engelsian orthodoxy'.<sup>41</sup> As Ilyenkov's work concentrated on the same problems, it is striking that it has had so little resonance in Western discussions. Other Eastern-European Marx researchers, such as Rosdolsky and Zelený<sup>42</sup> have been much more widely recognised and dealt with in the West, and even in the New Marx Reading, than Ilyenkov.

Backhaus's ideas of the special logical character of Marx's analysis have been preserved and further developed in Germany, especially in the work of Michael Heinrich. His interpretation of *Capital* is quite influential, since the standard work used by the German *Capital* reading groups is his *Kritik der politischen*

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38. Mamardashvili 1968.

39. Zinoviev 2002. Both Mamardashvili and Zinoviev belonged to the so-called 'Moscow Circle of Logics', which was active in the 1950s and 60s and concentrated on the question of methodology of sciences. Of the members of the circle Boris Grushin, later a sociologist, was, too, interested in Marx and wrote in the 50s his diplom work on the problem of logical and historical in Marx. Although Ilyenkov of course knew these Moscow philosophers, his own approach differed from them, since he stressed the continuing relevance of Hegel's dialectics in Marxism, a view not shared so enthusiastically by the members of the Logics Circle. Later, Zinoviev and Mamardashvili abandoned Marxism, while some other representatives of the Circle never had been Marxists.

40. Hoff 2009, p. 252.

41. Elbe 2008, p. 42.

42. Bakhurst 1991, p. 137.

*Ökonomie. Eine Einführung*.<sup>43</sup> The book is now into its tenth printing, and is also used widely in the German universities. Heinrich's basic idea is that the *Capital* is a fundamentally ambivalent book, consisting of the traditional discourse of the labour-theory of value and the new and revolutionary 'monetary theory of value' (*monetäre Werttheorie*). From this point of view, Heinrich interprets Marx's definitions of abstract labour as a kind of Ricardian residue.<sup>44</sup> Heinrich states that in Marx's new, monetary understanding, abstract labour is as a reduction from the heterogeneity of concrete labours, taking place in exchange.<sup>45</sup> From our perspective this interpretation does not do justice to the double character of labour in Marx's analysis. Marx is examining labour from the qualitative perspective, as an 'expenditure of human labour power in a special form and with a definite aim' (*Verausgabung menschlicher Arbeitskraft in besondrer zweckbestimmter Form*) and from the quantitative perspective, as an 'identical abstract human labour' (*gleiche menschliche oder abstrakt menschliche Arbeit*).<sup>46</sup> Concrete and abstract labour are inseparable dimensions of a single labour-process.

Heinrich rejects Marx's physiological definitions of abstract labour as trans-historical, and thus false, because any labour is, according to him, expenditure of brains, nerves and muscles.<sup>47</sup> He compares this to the fact that all people breathe, but that from this fact we cannot infer anything about the social relations of people or anything about their equality.<sup>48</sup>

Heinrich insists that what he calls the naturalist view on abstract labour understands it as fully 'unsocial', even if it does form a constituent of the real labour-process.<sup>49</sup> In claiming this, Heinrich does not appear to differentiate between an automatic natural process – such as breathing – and a consciously conducted personal activity of human-beings, a process through which man confronts nature as a natural force, and regulates his metabolism with nature.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Heinrich seems to ignore the fact that for Marx, human labour is always teleological (*zweckmäßige Tätigkeit*), and that it is the *telos* which directs the labour process although its material execution is physical. Ilyenkov seems to have grasped this point more aptly than Heinrich, since Ilyenkov states that, for

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43. Fülberth 2012, p. 137. In recent years there has been a Marx boom in Germany, leading to the forming of numerous reading circles studying Marx's *Capital*. For more information, see <<http://www.das-kapital-lesen.de/>>. Heinrich's introduction has now also been published under the title *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's 'Capital'*, by Monthly Review Press.

44. Heinrich 2006, pp. 17, 218.

45. Heinrich 2009, p. 101. 'Resultat der das Austauschverhältnis charakterisierenden Reduktion der verschiedenen konkret nützlichen Arbeiten auf gleichartige Arbeit'.

46. Marx 1962, p. 61.

47. Heinrich 2004.

48. Heinrich 2009, p. 102.

49. Heinrich 2005, p. 48.

50. Marx 1962, p. 192.

Marx, labour, not breathing (though the latter, too, is necessary), is the basis of human existence.<sup>51</sup> In Marx's materialism, labour is not substitutable with any other physiological process.

We also believe that understanding the role of abstract labour requires an understanding of Marx's dialectics of form and essence. Marx designates abstract labour as the *substance* of value, and this signals that abstract labour is the essence of labour under capitalism. Heinrich seems to be bothered by the concept of substance, setting his monetary interpretation of value-theory against the 'substantialist' reading of the traditional Marxists, which is combined with the 'naturalist' understanding of abstract labour. Heinrich even characterises this traditional reading as posing value 'as a kind of independent substance inside the single commodity'.<sup>52</sup>

Instead of this 'substantialist' reading, Heinrich offers a monetary reading for which 'abstract labour is a *violent* abstraction from the differences of labour, an abstraction which is only *present* in exchange, in the relation of commodity to commodity'.<sup>53</sup> Heinrich interprets abstract labour as a social relation, yet concludes that it can not, in any case, be expended (*verausgabt*).<sup>54</sup> In our view, value – not its substance – is, for Marx, a social relationship between producers.<sup>55</sup> To us, it seems, this confusion of categories reflects an exaggerated emphasis on the economic appearances. Stavros Mavroudeas characterizes as a common attempt in the recent debates over the nature of abstract labour to discover an unmediated, actual presence for abstract labour within money.<sup>56</sup> Böhm-Bawerk's critique is based on an outright rejection of 'the dialectic of form-essence – and therefore of the value-price relationship – as Hegelian sophistry'.<sup>57</sup> In turn, some attempts at defending Marxian value-theory are based on accepting the methodological assumptions of the refutation.

[T]he search for an unmediated presence of essence within the totality of concretes – while attempting to answer the positivist rejection of essence as non-existent and, hence, as either redundant or a logical trick – falls into the

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51. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 71.

52. Heinrich 2004.

53. Heinrich 2004.

54. 'Abstrakte Arbeit als gesellschaftliches Verhältnis kann überhaupt nicht "verausgabt" werden' (Heinrich 2006, p. 218). See also Heinrich 2005, p. 49.

55. Kicillof and Starosta 2011 (p. 303) show how Bonefeld 2010 (p. 259) applies Marx's passages defining value to the substance of value. Bonefeld writes: 'Marx conceives of abstract labour as a "purely social reality" that can only appear in the social relations of "commodity to commodity"'.  
 56. Mavroudeas 2004, p. 186.  
 57. Mavroudeas 2004, p. 184.



same empiricist error by implicitly attributing the status of the “real” only to empirically tangible things.<sup>58</sup>

As Ilyenkov defines the difference of Marx’s dialectical method and empiricism, Marx proceeds from the appearance to the essence, in opposition to the metaphysician who believes the external appearance to be the only reality.<sup>59</sup> Heinrich rejects the idea of form-essence dialectics outright, stating that even if Marx’s talk of ‘appearance’ and ‘content’ may bring ‘appearance’ and ‘essence’ to mind, Marx does not talk about essence in the first chapter of *Capital*.<sup>60</sup>

Elsewhere, Heinrich argues that traditional Marxism, with its bias towards production, undermined the importance of the market, and even tended to interpret the relation of production and circulation as similar to that between essence and appearance, so that the latter was reduced to the role of an inadequate impression, or something incidental only.<sup>61</sup>

For Ilyenkov, Marx’s method is based upon an attempt to achieve a comprehension of the universal essence of phenomena. As Ilyenkov points out, in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx responded to the English empiricist Samuel Bailey – who could not imagine any value other than exchange-value between commodities – ‘as impossible as it is to “designate” or “express” a thought except by a quantity of syllables. Hence Bailey concludes that a thought is – syllables’.<sup>62</sup> Marx reminded Bailey that value is expressed in money, but it is not money. Appearances like prices and profits are as real as the essential side of social reality, its laws and tendencies.<sup>63</sup> Falling profits are no less real for an entrepreneur than the reason for it in the rising organic composition of total social capital. But to anyone who wants to be a successful businessman, staying at the level of appearances is enough. For a businessman making a mental generalisation, a notion of ‘profit’ in order to recognise it is enough. As Ilyenkov states:

In doing so, the entrepreneur *does not understand*, however, *what profit is*. He does not need it, either. In practice, he acts as an instinctive adherent of positivist philosophy and empirical logic. He merely lends a generalized expression to phenomena that are important and essential from his point of view, from the standpoint of his subjective goals, and this generalized expression of phenomena excellently serves him in practice as a concept permitting him to distinguish with certainty profit from non-profit. As an honest-to-goodness

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58. Mavroudeas 2004, p. 186.

59. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 266.

60. Heinrich 2009, p. 63. According to Heinrich, the term ‘essence’ appears for the first time in chapter twelve of *Capital*: see Marx 1962, p. 359.

61. Heinrich 2004.

62. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 265.

63. As Heinrich also notes elsewhere; see Heinrich 2009, p. 75.

positivist, he sincerely believes all talk about the inner nature of profit, about the essence and substance of this phenomenon, so dear to his heart, to be metaphysical sophistry, philosophising divorced from life.<sup>64</sup>

Instead, the scientist has to be engaged with the essences of things and phenomena. Still, appearances are not merely forms of manifestation of essence, but its mode of existence. Essences only exist in and through phenomena.

From Ilyenkov's materialist and dialectical perspective, the essence of a thing must be understood through the role it has in the concrete system of interaction with other things.<sup>65</sup> Understood in such a way, how could the essence manifest itself immediately? To demand an 'immediate manifestation' of the essence is to assert that it should be discernible without any interaction with the surrounding world. Understood in the way Ilyenkov proposes, essence must also emerge and develop historically. This is the point where Marx's substantialism differs from Ricardo's. Backhaus states that Ilyenkov's view cannot be distinguished from the Ricardian perspective; but he did not take into account that Ilyenkov, even if he praises Ricardo for a substantialist point of view on the economy, notices that Ricardo did not grasp the system of capitalist economy 'as a *historically emerging and developing* integral totality of relations'.<sup>66</sup> For Marx, essences are historically formed and changing.<sup>67</sup> So is the case with abstract labour. Abstract labour is the essence of labour in capitalism.<sup>68</sup> Labour as the universal substance appeared only within specific capitalist relations, Ilyenkov writes:

Labour as the universal substance, as an 'active form' appeared here, not only in consciousness but also in reality, as that 'proximate real genus' which Aristotle failed to see. The reduction of all phenomena to 'labour in general', to labour devoid of all qualitative differences, for the first time took place here in the reality of economic relations itself rather than in the abstract-making heads of theoreticians. Value became that *goal* for the sake of which each thing was realised in labour; it became an 'active form', a concrete universal law governing the destinies of each separate thing and each separate individual.

The point is that reduction to labour devoid of all differences appears here as an abstraction, but as a *real* abstraction 'which is made every day in the social process of production'. (Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*...) As Marx puts it, this reduction is no more and no less of an abstraction than resolution of organic bodies into air. 'Labour, thus measured by time, does not seem, indeed, to be the labour of different persons, but on

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64. Ilyenkov 1982, pp. 176–7. Emphasis original.

65. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 130.

66. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 194. Emphasis original.

67. Zelený 1980, p. 18.

68. Saad-Filho 2002, p. 10.

the contrary the different working individuals seem to be mere organs of this labour.' (ibid.)

Here labour in general, labour as such appears as a concrete universal substance, and a single individual and the single product of his labour, as *manifestations of this universal essence*.

The concept of labour expresses something greater than merely the identical elements that can be abstracted from the labour activities of individual persons. It is a real universal law which dominates the individual and the particular, determines their destinies, controls them, makes them into its organs, forcing them to perform the given functions and not some others...

A concept is a theoretical expression of this universal. Through the concept, every particular and individual element is apprehended precisely in those aspects which belong to the given whole, is an expression of the given concrete substance and is comprehended as an emerging and disappearing element of the movement of the concrete specific system of interaction. The substance itself, the concrete system of interacting phenomena is understood as system that was historically formed.<sup>69</sup>

We apologise for the long quotation, but it was necessary to show that, for Ilyenkov, the substance of value is a concrete system of interacting phenomena. Thus it is evident, *primo*, that it does not exist 'inside' the commodity; and *secundo*, it cannot manifest itself immediately. If we referred back to Spinoza's terminology, we might say that value becomes reachable in the concrete world only as 'modes' of the value-substance, and only a scientific analysis can reveal the substance 'behind' the individual expressions of value. Ilyenkov, although a pronounced 'Spinozist', does not here make any explicit comparison between Spinoza and Marx, but he undoubtedly would have accepted the application of Spinoza's view on substance on Marx's theory of value. In the scholium to Proposition 15 of the first part of *Ethics*, Spinoza wrote that we have two ways of thinking about quantity, namely 'abstractly and superficially', as we do in the imagination, or else 'as substance', which is possible only by the intellect – that is, by the 'force of abstraction', which, as Marx wrote in his preface to the first volume of *Capital*, has to replace the microscopes and chemical reagents used by the natural sciences.

We already mentioned, above, how Backhaus quoted the passage from Ilyenkov, which states that '[t]his elementary objective economic reality'; that is, the direct exchange of one commodity for another commodity 'existed

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69. Ilyenkov 1982, pp. 97–8. Emphasis original.

long before the emergence of capitalism',<sup>70</sup> and saw here the archetype of a premonetary theory of value in Marxism. However, Ilyenkov is here referring to the nature of complete abstraction in Marx's method. The full abstraction applied by Marx – instead of picking a common trait necessarily present in every particular individual case – defines a particular economic concreteness, a cell-form of the investigated concrete whole. Instead of a common feature, it expresses the concrete characteristics of 'the objectively simplest further indivisible element of a system of interaction'.<sup>71</sup>

This idea of an elementary 'cell-form' identifies the object of study as an organic body. It is historically formed and its parts originate in different time-periods, but their essence is defined by the role that they assume in the whole.

Although Ilyenkov does not mention the matter in the text of *DAC* published in 1960, it is obvious – as we already have mentioned – that he sees the methodological role of the 'cell' foreshadowed by Spinoza's idea of a *causa proxima*. In the same manner as Spinoza insisted that the definition of the circle should not comprise only a set of abstract general features of the circle, but also the manner how it is produced, its proximate cause, Marx, too, located the essential traits of capitalist mode of production in the commodity, which thus forms the 'cell' from which further analysis of capitalism starts. Actually, the idea of the methodological significance of 'cell' forms is not an original insight of Ilyenkov's: it was presented already in the 1930s by the psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky, who explicitly referred to Marx's *Capital*.<sup>72</sup>

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70. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 198.

71. Ilyenkov 1982, p. 226.

72. For example, in his last, posthumously published book *Myshlenie i rech* (1936, abridged English translation 1962 with the title *Thought and Language*), Vygotsky found the 'cell' for all further analysis of thought and language in word-meaning, from which the researcher should, therefore, start: 'In our opinion the right course to follow is to use the other type of analysis, which may be called *analysis into units*. By unit we mean a product of analysis which, unlike elements, retains all the basic properties of the whole and which cannot be further divided without losing them. . . . [the living cell] What is the basic unit of verbal thought? . . . [W]ord meaning. . . . The conception of word meaning as a unit of both generalising thought and social interchange is of incalculable value for the study of language and thought'. In *Mind and Society*, he explicitly connects the idea of cell as the smallest unit delivered by analysis, with Marx's method: 'The whole of *Capital* is written according to the following method: Marx analyses a single living "cell" of capitalist society – for example the nature of value. Within this cell he discovers the structure of the entire system and all its economic institutions. Anyone who could discover what a "psychological" cell is – the mechanism producing even a single response – would find the key to psychology as a whole'. It is rather obvious that Ilyenkov was heavily influenced, here, by Vygotsky. In this respect, it is, indeed, justifiable to speak of a 'Vygotsky – Ilyenkov line' in Soviet philosophy, as Sergey Mareev does in his recent book (see Mareev 2008).

In spite of our criticism, we hold that the value-form approach has raised interesting and important questions in discussion and has rightly tried to provide a social and historical interpretation of value. We also think, as Alex Callinicos has pointed out, that besides, for example, Rosdolsky, Ilyenkov had already provided a theoretical work on the topic that value-form theories aimed to show, namely that Marx's theory is not vulnerable to the neo-Ricardian assault, because rather than being an empirical claim, it offers a wider theoretical view of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>73</sup>

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73. Callinicos 2005, p. 42.

# Emancipating *Open Marxism*: E.V. Ilyenkov's Post-Cartesian Anti-Dualism

Alex Levant

Evald Vasilyevich Ilyenkov has had immeasurably more influence on Soviet and post-Soviet theory than on theory in the West. Despite being 'intellectually mobbed',<sup>1</sup> prevented from travelling abroad and eventually from teaching, leading to his premature death, his impact has been profound. Ilyenkov is widely recognised as the most influential Soviet-Marxist philosopher in the post-Stalin period. In the West, however, despite the availability of some of his work in English translation, his impact has been marginal. To date, only one major book on Ilyenkov has been written in English. One of the principal objectives of this volume has been to help bring the full weight of his work into dialogue with theoretical problems in the West.

Despite sharing certain features with Western Marxism, Ilyenkov has been largely excluded from that tradition. In fact, his work illuminates the subterranean world of 'creative Soviet Marxism', which does not neatly fit into either Western Marxism or Soviet Marxism. However, in addition to helping us reconsider certain hidden remainders that have been left out of our intellectual histories, he also offers insights that are germane to current theoretical issues in the West.

Ilyenkov's work should be of particular interest to contemporary theorists who position themselves through a critique of postmodern relativism on the one hand, but who are equally critical of positivistic

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1. Oittinen 2000, p. 16.

truth-claims on the other. Although writing in a different context, Ilyenkov's work has many affinities with contemporary anti-postmodernists such as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. However, unlike Žižek, Ilyenkov argues for a post-Cartesian subject based upon a Marxist reading of Spinoza's concept of the thinking body.<sup>2</sup> Like Badiou, he is critical of the fixation on language in phenomenological and post-structural thought, and also shares the view that subjectivity is not an inherently human trait, but rather is the product of a social process. However, his position on science would be much closer to someone like John Holloway than Badiou.<sup>3</sup> There are also some interesting common elements with Walter Benjamin.<sup>4</sup> While all of these connections are worth exploring (and will likely be explored as his work becomes more readily available in English), in this chapter I aim specifically to bring Ilyenkov's thought to bear on a set of debates about structure and agency that developed in the journal *Open Marxism* between 1992 and 1995. I focus on Holloway's contribution to these debates – an important contemporary philosopher in the Western Marxist tradition whose book *Change the World without Taking Power* has been quite influential and the subject of much debate.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Holloway, a broad range of theorists inhabits the theoretical space of *Open Marxism*, including Werner Bonefeld, Simon Clarke and Tony Negri. Reminiscent of Ilyenkov's critique of Diamat, its primary objective is to 'emancipate' Marxism from 'the massive dead weight of positivist and scientistic/economistic strata',<sup>6</sup> what it called a 'Marxism of structures'.<sup>7</sup> What unites them is a project of a certain type of renewal of the Marxist tradition.

At the heart of the matter is the question of the power of practice. We know from Marx that we make our history, but not in conditions of our own choosing. At issue is the relationship of practice to these conditions. The way this relationship is understood marks the defining line between *Open Marxism* and its other ('closed Marxism'), which stands accused of fetishising these conditions and hence limiting the full power of human activity, which 'accepts the horizons

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2. 'This book thus endeavors to reassert the Cartesian subject' (Žižek 1999, p. xxiv). 'There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation – body and thought – but only *one single* object, which is the *thinking body* [which] does not consist of two Cartesian halves – "thought lacking a body" and a "body lacking thought" ... It is not a special "soul", installed by God in the human body as in a temporary residence, that thinks, but the *body of man* itself'; Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 31–2.

3. 'Badiou's "knowledge" is closer to (a positivist notion of) science'; Žižek 1999, p. 147.

4. Levant 2011b.

5. For instance, see Hearse 2007.

6. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 1.

7. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. x.

of a given world as its own theoretical horizons',<sup>8</sup> and results in a 'politics of accommodation'.

In this chapter I aim to demonstrate the relevance of Ilyenkov's work to the project of *Open Marxism* (hereafter *OM*). Although excluded from the 'subterranean tradition' in which *OM* situates itself, there are many affinities between Ilyenkov and the *OM* project, including a focus on activity, anti-dualism, and anti-positivism. However, I also take seriously recent criticisms of Holloway and the philosophy (articulated in *OM*) that informs his political conclusions. Drawing on Ilyenkov's post-Cartesian anti-dualist reading of Marx, I seek to address some of these criticisms, specifically *OM*'s perceived subjectivism.<sup>9</sup>

## Western Marxism and Soviet Marxism

The term 'Western Marxism' is broadly associated with Perry Anderson's influential work of 1976, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, where it is understood as a body of theory that emerged in the wake of the defeat of 'Classical Marxism', and is associated with names such as Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, Benjamin, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Adorno, Sartre, Goldmann, Althusser and Colletti.<sup>10</sup> According to Anderson, what principally distinguishes this body of thought from Classical Marxism is its divorce from revolutionary political practice, that is to say, its main contributions were produced in a context of isolation from mass movements and mass political organisations.

However, this tradition is also defined by its shift in emphasis from political economy to problems of culture and subjectivity. As Russell Jacoby argues, these theorists are distinguished not only from Classical Marxism but also from Soviet Marxism in their concern 'to rescue Marxism from positivism and crude materialism'.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the term 'Western Marxism' often serves to distinguish certain currents in Marxist thought from theory developed in the Soviet Union, with 'Soviet Marxism' appearing as its other in various ways.

Ilyenkov does not easily fit into this binary opposition. If Western Marxism aimed to rescue the Marxist tradition from positivism and crude materialism, then it certainly shared this aim with Ilyenkov. In fact, this commonality was not only theoretical: Soviet Marxism, in the form of Diamat, was their common target.

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8. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. xii.

9. Bensaid 2005; De Angelis 2005; and Stoetzler 2005.

10. Incidentally, Colletti wrote a long forward to the Italian edition of Ilyenkov's first book, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*. See Introduction on the 'Italian Affair'.

11. Jacoby 1983, p. 524.



Ilyenkov is not unique in this regard. There were multiple schools of Marxist theory in the Soviet Union, and Diamat was dominant largely from 1931 to the mid-1950s. For instance, the period between 1924 and 1929 stands out for the vigorous debates between two schools of thought – the ‘Mechanists’ and the ‘Deborinites’. The Mechanists were a broad group of theorists who shared ‘the view that the explanatory resources of science are able to provide a complete account of objective reality’.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the Deborinites were a more cohesive group of philosophers who were involved in Deborin’s seminar at the Institute of Red Professors. The latter ‘dismissed the Mechanists’ optimism about the global explanatory potential of natural science’ and ‘held that the Mechanists were committed to blatant reductionism’.<sup>13</sup> Deborin wrote, ‘In our opinion, thought is a particular quality of matter, the subjective side of the objective, material, i.e., physiological processes, with which it is not identical and to which it cannot be reduced’.<sup>14</sup> During this period, theorists in both schools developed a considerable amount of work, much of it aimed at overcoming reductionism in Marxist philosophy. Many of these debates took place in the pages of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. These volumes have yet to be translated into English.

New scholarship has been produced in recent years challenging the myth that Soviet Marxism amounted to little more than Diamat. While certain figures from the pre-Diamat era (such as Lukács, Lenin, Vygotsky, Deborin, and so on) have been well known in the West for many decades, comparatively little work has been done on the post-Stalinist period. Figures like Ilyenkov, Batishchev, Shchedrovitsky and others have not registered in the West as they have in their country of origin.

The legacy of creative Soviet Marxism in the post-Stalin period continues in post-Soviet Russia today. A number of scholarly books and special issues of academic journals have been published in recent years, which indicate a renewed interest in this material. One of the many interesting lines of inquiry has been the debate on continuities between creative Soviet Marxism of the pre-Diamat period and that of the post-Stalin period. This debate is interesting as it both illuminates a body of thought that has not been adequately studied in the West, and also asks us to reconsider the very categories of ‘Western Marxism’ and ‘Soviet Marxism’.

In the very sparse scholarship that currently exists in English on this topic, the debate between Ilyenkov (and his generation of young theorists) and the *Diamatchiki*<sup>15</sup> echoed the debate between the Deborinites and the Mechanists

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12. Bakhurst 1991, p. 31.

13. Bakhurst 1991, p. 37.

14. Bakhurst 1991, p. 38.

15. Proponents of Diamat.

in the 1920s. As David Bakhurst (author of the only major English-language book on Ilyenkov) writes, 'Although contemporary Soviet philosophers may not see themselves as re-creating the early controversy, the continuity is undeniable. This is particularly so in the case of Ilyenkov, who can be seen as heir to the Deborinites' project'.<sup>16</sup> However, in a recent book on the subject, Sergey Mareev (contemporary Russian philosopher and representative of the 'Ilyenkov School' of Soviet philosophy) challenges this reading. 'One of the principal distinguishing features of Mareev's account is that he challenges this reading of the development of Soviet philosophy, which has become dominant in Western scholarship'.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, he locates the roots of Diamat not only among the mechanists, but also in the work of the Deborinites.<sup>18</sup> In fact, he traces its development back to Deborin himself, and even further back to his teacher G.V. Plekhanov.<sup>19</sup>

What is particularly interesting in Mareev's account is that he locates Lukács – widely recognised as a founder of Western Marxism – as a key figure in the development of creative Soviet Marxism. Rather than Deborin, Lukács appears as the precursor to Ilyenkov. Mareev suggests that the vulgar materialist positivism of Diamat can be traced back to Soviet philosophy in the 1920s and to Deborin in particular who read Marx through Plekhanov. He notes that Plekhanov's followers

occupied practically all key positions in the newly created Soviet ideological apparatus and the system of higher Marxist education. D.B. Ryazanov headed the Marx-Engels Institute [and] A.M. Deborin became in 1921 the editor-in-chief of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. They determined the character of 'Marxist' philosophy in the 20s and 30s.<sup>20</sup>

Although a direct line has not been established, the early Lukács (as opposed to Deborin) appears as the theorist who, like Ilyenkov, argues for an 'activity approach'.

Recall that Lukács was denounced by Zinoviev at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern:

This theoretical revisionism cannot be allowed to pass with impunity. Neither will we tolerate our Hungarian Comrade Lukacs doing the same thing in the domain of philosophy and sociology... We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism in our Communist International.<sup>21</sup>

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16. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26–7.

17. Maidansky 2009, p. 202.

18. Mareev 2008, p. 18.

19. Levant 2011a, p. 183.

20. Mareev 2008, p. 17.

21. G. Zinoviev quoted in Rees 2000, p. 25.

It was Deborin who lead the charge, dismissing Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* as 'idealist'.<sup>22</sup>

Mareev notes that 'there was a tradition of Soviet philosophy which was counterposed to "diamatskoi". This tradition is related to names such as G. Lukacs, L.S. Vygotsky and E.V. Ilyenkov'.<sup>23</sup> By noting the importance of Lukács to this anti-Diamat tradition in Soviet philosophy, Mareev invites us to examine a very important point of contact with Western Marxism. The anti-positivist thread we find in both creative Soviet Marxism and Western Marxism share a common focus, which can be seen in the current 'continuity debates' on Soviet philosophy.

The categories 'Western Marxism' and 'Soviet Marxism' occlude the 'subterranean tradition' of creative Soviet Marxism. This tradition is significant not merely as a matter of historical record, but also because it has much to offer to contemporary theoretical problems in the West. To illustrate this fact, I will now examine a specific set of debates developed in *Open Marxism*, which focused on the question of agency, namely on the relationship between human activity and the alienated society it has produced.

### Structure and Agency in *Open Marxism*

In 1992, Pluto Press published the first of three volumes of *Open Marxism*. This publication asserted itself as 'an alternative reference point'<sup>24</sup> in response to the crisis of Marxism, which had been announced by Althusser in 1978.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of this alternative reference point, this crisis was not located in Marxism *per se* but was instead found in a "Marxism of structures" à la Althusser and Poulantzas'.<sup>26</sup> It identified a number of recurring problems in this 'Marxism of structures', but rather than going the way of 'Post-Marxism' it instead sought to articulate another Marxism, to 'emancipate' Marxism from these approaches, 'to clear the massive deadweight of positivist and scientistic/economistic strata',<sup>27</sup> as Bonefeld, Gunn, Holloway and Psychopedis wrote in the introduction to *Open Marxism Volume 3*.<sup>28</sup>

*Open Marxism* did not, however, announce itself as a *new* Marxism. Rather, it located itself in 'a subterranean tradition' within Marxism, whose figures include 'Luxemburg, the early Lukács, Korsch, Bloch, Adorno, Rubin, Pashukanis,

22. Deborin 1924, p. 4.

23. Mareev 2008, p. 12.

24. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. xi.

25. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. ix.

26. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. x.

27. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 1.

28. For a critical secondary source, see Bieler and Morton 2003, pp. 470–5.

Rosdolsky and Johannes Agnoli'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, *Open Marxism* focused on creating a theoretical space within the Marxist tradition, 'to mark out an area for discussion',<sup>30</sup> by reasserting certain existing tendencies within Marxism. Although there are clear affinities with Ilyenkov's critique of positivism, *OM* does not include creative Soviet Marxism from the post-Stalin period in its subterranean tradition.

*OM* defines itself against what it calls 'closed Marxism', which is a grouping of Marxist approaches that share certain characteristics that *OM* finds problematic.<sup>31</sup> These approaches include a variety of Marxisms – such as scientific,<sup>32</sup> orthodox,<sup>33</sup> determinist,<sup>34</sup> capital-logic,<sup>35</sup> and structuralist,<sup>36</sup> among others. These 'types' of Marxism overlap in some respects but remain quite varied in others; however, from the perspective of *OM*, they share certain features that characterise them as 'closed'. According to the editors of *Open Marxism Volume 1*, Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis, "Closed" Marxism is Marxism which does either or both of two interrelated things: it accepts the horizons of a given world as its own theoretical horizons and/or it announces a determinism which is causalist or teleological as the case may be'.<sup>37</sup>

According to *OM*, these limited objectives and/or determinism arise from how we understand the relationship between practice and the society it creates. At issue here is the fact that we produce our social world under alienated conditions, creating a society that stands above us and which informs our activity. Bonefeld cites Horkheimer's remark that 'human beings produce, through their own labour, a reality which increasingly enslaves them'.<sup>38</sup> Bonefeld asks: 'What constitutes the relation between "human practice" and the "perverted and disenchanted world" of capitalism?'<sup>39</sup> A central difference between *OM* and closed Marxism is their respective approaches to this question.

According to *OM*, closed Marxism examines bourgeois society often in isolation from human activity,<sup>40</sup> attempting to understand capitalism's apparent 'laws of motion'. What troubles *OM* about this approach is the separation between human activity and its product, and the formulation of this product

29. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. xii.

30. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 4.

31. It must be noted that not all Marxist thought fits neatly into these categories. There are Marxist approaches that can be understood neither as closed Marxism nor open Marxism. For example, see Lebowitz 2006, p. 36.

32. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 1.

33. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 2.

34. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. xii.

35. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. xii.

36. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992a, p. ix.

37. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. xii.

38. Bonefeld 1995, p. 184.

39. Bonefeld 1995, p. 182.

40. For his critique of Lovering, see Bonefeld 1995, p. 186.

as the conditions in which people act. The social world examined by closed Marxism comes to be seen as the objective conditions in which struggle takes place. Holloway argues that such Marxism becomes 'a theory not of struggle, but of the objective conditions of struggle, a very different thing'.<sup>41</sup>

Holloway locates this problem in the manner in which closed Marxism identifies the concept of science with objectivity:

In the tradition of 'orthodox' Marxism [which he uses interchangeably with closed Marxism], 'scientific' comes to be identified with 'objective'. 'Science' is understood in the positivist sense as excluding subjectivity. The claim that Marxism is scientific is taken to mean that subjective struggle finds support in the objective movement of the contradictions of capitalism. A distinction is thus made between (subjective) struggle and the (objective) conditions of struggle.<sup>42</sup>

This identification of 'scientific' with 'objective' involves a pre-Marxist dualism between subject and object, and scientific Marxism comes to be seen as a science of the objective conditions in which class struggle takes place.

Holloway cites Marxist economics as an example of such a science:

One of the most pervasive forms of this dualist tradition, running from the far left to the revisionism of the late Communist Parties, is the notion of 'Marxist economics'. . . . *Capital*, in spite of its subtitle, *The Critique of Political Economy*, is seen as the key text of Marxist economics, and the categories developed there (value, surplus value, price, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, crisis, credit) are understood as economic categories, as having an objective validity which does not depend on class struggle.<sup>43</sup>

*Capital*, thus, becomes an analysis of the society produced by alienated labour, which has certain laws of motion that can be understood and used to inform class struggle. Using the categories in *Capital* one can grasp the movement of capital and determine the openings that can be pursued by human activity through class struggle. Holloway argues that this dualist perspective runs through much of Marxism from right to left. 'Even in the case of what might be called far-left analyses, analyses which emphasise the role of subjective struggle in the transformation of society – as in the case of Pannekoek, Mattick or Luxemburg, for example – a dualism is assumed between the objective, economic analysis of the development of the contradictions of capitalism and the possibilities of subjective struggle which those contradictions open up'.<sup>44</sup> (The same could be said

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41. Holloway 1995, p. 160.

42. Holloway 1995, p. 159.

43. Holloway 1995, pp. 160–1.

44. Holloway 1995, p. 161.

for Gramsci as well).<sup>45</sup> The separation of structure from struggle is one of the central characteristics of closed Marxism, which appears in the Marxist tradition in various ways.

In addition to the objectification of the social world, another problematic characteristic of closed Marxism, according to *OM*, is the 'subjectification' of capital. This approach closely resembles the separating of structure from struggle because it likewise separates the product of human activity from class struggle. However, instead of positing it as an object with self-perpetuating laws of motion, it is posited as a subject with its own life-impulse. From this perspective, capital appears to confront human beings as an organism with a life of its own.<sup>46</sup> Studying its life-process can help guide human activity, but capital itself appears as something distinct from practice.

While closed Marxism posits either capital as a subject with its own life-process or the social world as a structure with internal laws of motion, both of which confront or constrain human activity, *OM* sees capital's apparent life-process and the social world's apparently internal laws of motion as products of nothing other than human activity (rather than internal aspects of those products themselves). As Bonefeld writes, 'capital has no logic independent of labour's social practice'.<sup>47</sup>

From the perspective of closed Marxism, the product of human activity appears to confront its creators like a self-perpetuating organism or structure – a Frankenstein's monster with a life of its own, or a structure with its own laws of motion. In contrast, *OM* argues that what appears as self-perpetuating is actually perpetuated by human activity. By positing a structure with its own laws of motion, closed Marxism erects a social world that confronts human subjects not as their alienated product, a product of class struggle, but as something separate from class struggle that constitutes the terrain on which struggle is waged. The laws of this social world thus appear as immutable, and their motion creates opportunities that form the horizon of what is possible to achieve through human activity. Bonefeld argues that '[p]olitically, the abandonment of the human subject leads to an accommodation to "objective conditions"'.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, *OM* seeks to theorise a much more volatile social world by reasserting the centrality of human activity.

Practice assumes a central role in *OM*. By approaching the social world as requiring constant reproduction, rather than being readymade, *OM* locates the ongoing presence of human activity in what appears in closed Marxism as

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45. Gramsci 1971, p. 178.

46. See Bonefeld 1995, pp. 182–3; p. 187 for his critique of Jessop.

47. Bonefeld 1995, p. 201.

48. Bonefeld *et al.* 1995, p. 184.

the objective conditions in which people act. The editors of *Open Marxism Volume 2* write: 'a common concern of our contributors is their rejection of an understanding of practice as merely attendant upon the unfolding of structural or deterministic "laws"'.<sup>49</sup> Thus, a central objective of *OM* is to expand the scope of what is possible by overcoming closed Marxism's objectivism (but without slipping into subjectivism).

Holloway begins his attempt to overcome the dualism between struggle and conditions of struggle with *Operaismo*,<sup>50</sup> as an example of what he calls 'anti-orthodox Marxism'.<sup>51</sup> He writes, 'In recent years, one of its most powerful formulations has come from the current which developed, primarily in Italy, from the 1960s onwards, variously referred to as "autonomist Marxism" or "operaismo"'.<sup>52</sup> He focuses on Mario Tronti's reversal of the primacy of capitalist development (conditions of struggle) over workers (class struggle):

This must be the first step: to reverse the polarity of the Marxist tradition and to start clearly from below, from struggle, from negativity.... To reverse the polarity is to put us back at the correct starting point: to reassert that Marxism is a theory against society, not a theory of society, a theory of struggle and not a theory of the objective conditions of struggle.<sup>53</sup>

Holloway makes clear that Tronti's reversal of polarity is not only a reversal of perspective, but a reversal of cause and effect: 'seeing working-class struggle as determining capitalist development'.<sup>54</sup> Positing capital as a function of the working class is understood by some autonomists, according to Holloway, in two ways: first, the history of capital 'is a history of *reaction* to working-class struggle';<sup>55</sup> and second, 'capital is nothing other than the *product* of the working class',<sup>56</sup> with the first point being the more prominent. He illustrates the first with Negri's assertion that Keynesianism was a response to the Russian Revolution.<sup>57</sup> Holloway begins with *Operaismo*. However, he claims that this tradition remains plagued by the dualisms that characterise closed Marxism. As he writes,

The reversal of polarity between capital and labour, essential though it be as a starting point, ends by reproducing the polarity in a different form. The traditional Marxist analysis emphasises the logical development of capital and

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49. Bonefeld *et al.* 1992b, p. xi.

50. For a history of *Operaismo*, see Wright 2002.

51. Holloway 1995, p. 162.

52. Holloway 1995, p. 162.

53. Holloway 1995, p. 162.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

relegates class struggle to a 'but also' role; autonomist theory liberates class struggle from its subordinate role, but still leaves it confronting an external logic of capital. The difference is that the logic is understood now not in terms of 'economic' laws and tendencies, but in terms of a political struggle to defeat the enemy. . . . Autonomist theory has been crucial in reasserting the nature of Marxist theory as a theory of struggle, but the real force of Marx's theory of struggle lies not in the reversal of the polarity between capital and labour, but in its dissolution.<sup>58</sup>

While the dualism between subject and object leads closed Marxism toward objectivism and a concomitant 'politics of accommodation', the same theoretical weakness leads autonomist Marxism, according to Holloway, toward subjectivism.

To overcome this theoretical split between subject and object, struggle and conditions of struggle, he advances the concept of *form-analysis*. Form-analysis is based on the concept of form as a 'mode of existence'<sup>59</sup> (as opposed to appearance). He uses 'form-analysis' to grasp an alternative understanding of the subject/object relation.

Form-analysis, the analysis of 'things' and 'facts' as forms of the totality of social relations, dissolves hard reality into the flow of the changing forms of social relations. What appears to be separate (the state, money, countries, and so on) can now be understood in terms of their separation-in-unity or unity-in-separation. It is now possible to see how the dualism of subject and object might be overcome theoretically, by reconceptualising the separation of subject and object as a separation-in-unity, by criticizing the dualism to reach an understanding of subject and object as forms of the same social totality. That which previously appeared to be hard and objective is now revealed as transitory, fluid. The bricks and mortar of capitalist reality crumble, theoretically.<sup>60</sup>

This passage is instructive as it demonstrates both the strength and weakness of Holloway's form-analysis. The strength is his orientation around an anti-dualist understanding of form (as mode of existence as opposed to essence and appearance), which resonates strongly with Ilyenkov's view, as we will examine below. This approach helps to overcome both objectivist and subjectivist forms of reductionism, which can lead to a politics of accommodation. However, the weakness of his approach is that in the process of criticising theories of 'the conditions of struggle' (as opposed to struggle itself), these conditions seem to dissolve into

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58. Holloway 1995, p. 164.

59. Holloway 1995, p. 167.

60. Holloway 1995, p. 166.



struggle in general. In my view, this philosophical approach produces the political outline articulated in *Change the World Without Taking Power*.

## Holloway and Subjectivism

A central objective of the *OM* project is to challenge the notion of objective conditions of struggle without slipping into subjectivism. Holloway positions theorists into closed Marxism in a similar fashion to the way Marx positioned German idealists and British political economists, namely as fetishising existing social relations. By positing human activity as the source of social relations, Marx was able to go beyond the apparent self-constitution and inevitability of his social world. Similarly, Holloway stresses that class struggle is the source of what appear as objective conditions.

What needs to be considered, however, is that putting class struggle in the centre does not necessarily lead to some of his conclusions. In fact, many so-called closed Marxists probably would not have a problem with formulating objective conditions as a form of activity, but they may have a problem with how these objective conditions seem to suddenly vanish with this discovery; they appear to be overcome not only theoretically, but also practically. I am suggesting that there appears to be a slippage from overcoming the subject/object split in theory to overcoming it in practice. For instance, upon advancing his innovative concept of form-analysis, Holloway writes:

The objectivity of capitalism, the 'that's the way things are' of capitalist reality, has now dissolved. The concepts of totality, form and so on provided a basis for overcoming the hard separation between subject and object, for conceptualising the separation as a separation-in-unity/unity-in-separation. However, it is only when those concepts are understood in a practical-genetic sense that the symmetry of subject and object disappears: it is only then that it becomes clear that there is not object, there is only a subject.<sup>61</sup>

However, the dualism between subject and object cannot be overcome theoretically because it is a practical problem (as Holloway acknowledges) that is grasped theoretically, and which can only be solved by transforming the conditions under which people act, namely the alienating conditions of the capitalist mode of production. It is this alienation, and not faulty theory, which produces an objective world that stands above the subjects who produce and reproduce it. Efforts to 'solve' this problem in theory often lead either to vulgar materialism,

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61. Holloway 1995, p. 171.

objectivism and accommodation on the one hand, or idealism, subjectivism and voluntarism on the other.<sup>62</sup>

If we understand subject and object as forms of human activity (as Holloway does, but nevertheless reaches a different conclusion),<sup>63</sup> then it is not necessarily objectivist or idealist to recognise ‘objective reality’ as alienated class struggle. Simply stressing the centrality of class struggle cannot solve the question of the character of this objective reality.<sup>64</sup> Even if this objective reality is a form of practice, to what degree does it inform activity that is currently in the subject form? In other words, what is the relationship between the object form of practice and the subject form? It seems to me that a distinction must be made between recognising the power of alienated objective reality over us, and positing this reality as self-perpetuating and inevitable.

Holloway appears ambivalent on the nature and significance of the object form of practice. On the one hand, he seems to recognise not only the impact of practice upon the object form, but also that the object form impacts upon practice. He writes:

Whereas from the perspective of the social flow of doing, the existence of an object is merely a fleeting moment in the flow of subjective constitution (or doing), capitalism depends on the conversion of that fleeting moment into a durable objectification. But of course durable autonomy is an illusion, a very real illusion. The separation of done from doing is a real illusion, a real process in which the done nevertheless never ceases to depend on the doing. Likewise, the separation of existence from constitution is a real illusion, a real process in which existence never ceases to depend on constitution.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, he appears to suggest that the object form of practice has no bearing at all on the subject form. He writes, ‘Once it is understood that money, capital, the state are nothing but the struggle to form, to discipline, to structure what Hegel calls “the sheer unrest of life”, then it is clear that their development can be understood only as practice, as undetermined struggle’.<sup>66</sup> The

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62. ‘The concept of commodity fetishism can suggest an oversimplified solution to the subject/object dualism. Many Marxists now recognize that appearance is not simply a veil that mystifies people, making them unaware of the true nature of their social relations... Rather, the logic of capital exists precisely because relations between people really do take the form of relations between things. Fetishism points to the fact that objective laws exist only because they are rooted in subjective experiences that are constitutive of these laws’; Knafo 2002, p. 149.

63. For example, see Holloway 2002, p. 28: ‘Our capacity to do is always an interlacing of our activity with the previous or present activity of others’.

64. Lebowitz 2006, p. 45. ‘However salutary it is in the face of economism to repeat the phrase “class struggle” over and over again, it is not enough’.

65. Holloway 2002, p. 31.

66. Holloway 1995, p. 176.

objective form of previous alienated activity does not appear to be in any way a determinant of struggle. In fact, Holloway's 'struggle' seems to take place simultaneously in history and in a historical vacuum. In theory and in practice, it appears that we have, on the one hand, a subject acting in the context of the 'real illusion' of 'durable objectification', while on the other, a subject that is ahistorical, whereby 'it becomes clear that there is not object, there is only a subject'.

### Ilyenkov's Post-Cartesian Anti-Dualism: Emancipating *Open Marxism*

Holloway properly cautions us to avoid the politics of accommodation; however, his 'politics of the scream' has likewise been the object of criticism.<sup>67</sup> I seek to buttress Holloway's critique of closed Marxism, but to also offer an approach that is able to grasp 'the conditions of struggle' non-positivistically. Returning to Marx, I want to posit the conditions of struggle neither scientifically nor economically, but rather *historically*, as the dead labour of previous struggles that confronts living labour in the present. After all, it was Marx who wrote that people 'make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living'.<sup>68</sup> We may be the makers of our world, but our 'circumstances' (the alienated social forces under which we labour) continue to haunt us.<sup>69</sup>

Marx's conception of the relation between the objective and subjective forms of practice is in keeping with *OM*'s insistence on the centrality of struggle and on the internal relationship between subject and object. In fact, *OM*'s reading of Marx on this point is, in my view, fairly accurate. However, in contrast to Holloway, it becomes clear that there is not *only* a subject; rather, there is a subject acting under objective conditions – the objective form of its alienated activity – transmitted from the past.<sup>70</sup>

The work of Ilyenkov would make an interesting addition to the list of names in the subterranean tradition identified by *OM*, for he offers some insights into

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67. 'Why did all those screams, those millions of screams, repeated millions of times over, not only leave capital's despotic order standing but even leave it more arrogant than ever?'; Bensaid 2005, p. 172.

68. Marx 1963, p. 15.

69. For Holloway's response to criticisms of his book for being anti-historical, see Holloway 2007.

70. For a similar observation, but from a neo-Gramscian perspective, see Bieler and Morton 2003. 'Mantras such as "capital is class struggle" ... propagated by Open Marxism, simply elide how the historical development of capital accumulation is mediated by institutional forms of the social relations of production'; See Bieler and Morton 2003, pp. 473–4, 491. However, I do not support the entirety of their critique.

the relationship between subject and object that may help grasp the objective form of alienated activity without slipping into objectivism. Similar to *OM*, Ilyenkov's aim was to articulate an anti-reductionist Marxism, and the object of his critique was also positivistic interpretations of Marxism. Similar to Holloway, he was responding to the 'positivism and scientism that was prevalent in Soviet political and intellectual culture'.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, he was critical of dualism and had a conception of form similar to that of Holloway. There are many common features, as well as some differences, that I will elucidate below.

Ilyenkov articulated his thought in debates with those who he viewed as crude materialists. His work challenged the hegemony of Diamat in Soviet philosophy, as well as its application in psychology. For instance, in his well-known debates with Dubrovsky,<sup>72</sup> he sought to criticise crude materialism, which reduced human thought to a purely physiological process. In contrast, Ilyenkov stressed that in addition to physiological capacities, thought required the existence of a set of social practices which must be internalised by the individual and within which the individual 'awakened to conscious life'.

He understood these practices as part of a dynamic process that involves the transformation of matter through human activity, which produces an ideal moment, which informs subsequent human activity. In *Dialectics of the Ideal* he describes it as 'the process by which the *material* life-activity of social man [sic] begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming the "material" into the "ideal"), and then, having arisen, the "ideal" becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, "incarnation") of the ideal'.<sup>73</sup> A number of interesting consequences follow from this approach.

First, both objective matter and the thinking subject exist only as moments of a process, and outside of this process there cannot be a thinking subject. He writes:

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man [sic], as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such exists only

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71. Cole 2009.

72. 'The ideal is a purely individual phenomenon, realised by means of a certain type of cerebral neurodynamic process'; Dubrovsky 1971, p. 189.

73. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 18.

in the constant transformation of these two forms of its ‘external incarnation’ and does not coincide with either of them taken separately.<sup>74</sup>

Ilyenkov’s dialectical understanding of subject/object helps to avoid both subjectivist and objectivist reductionism.

Second, the relationship between the ideal and the material – ‘the objectivity (“truth-value”) of knowledge’<sup>75</sup> – is not a relationship between two discreet substances, but is rather two moments of a process that necessarily involves human activity. As Maidansky writes, ‘the term “ideal” denotes a relation between at least two different things, one of which adequately represents the essence of the other’.<sup>76</sup> This representation arises as a result of and in the course of human activity or transformation of the material. Consequently, the ideal representation of a material object always involves the activity into which that object is incorporated. ‘Since man [sic] is given the external thing in general only insofar as it is involved in the process of his activity, in the final product – in the idea – the image of the thing is always merged with the image of the activity in which this thing functions. *That constitutes the epistemological basis of the identification of the thing with the idea, of the real with the ideal*’.<sup>77</sup> This is precisely Ilyenkov’s response to Marx’s first thesis on Feuerbach: ‘The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such’. Similar to *OM*, reality is understood not as an object of contemplation, but as practice. However, in Ilyenkov, this practice is understood as part of a process that involves both a material and an ideal product, both of which inform this practice.

Third, this approach seeks to overcome not only a passive contemplative materialism, but also Cartesian dualism, by drawing on Spinoza’s concept of the thinking body. In his 1974 essay ‘Thought as an Attribute of Substance’ from *Dialectical Logic*, Ilyenkov writes, ‘There are not two different and originally contrary objects of investigation – body and thought – but only *one single* object, which is the *thinking body* [which] does not consist of two Cartesian halves – “thought lacking a body” and a “body lacking thought” . . . It is not a special “soul”, installed by God in the human body as in a temporary residence, that thinks, but the *body of*

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74. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 61.

75. Ilyenkov 2009a, p. 9.

76. Maidansky 2005, p. 296.

77. Ilyenkov 2009b, p. 162, my italics.

*man* itself'.<sup>78</sup> This body, however, is not the physical body of the individual, but is what Marx's called 'man's [sic] inorganic body'. As Maidansky writes:

Ilyenkov insisted that Marx had in mind not the bodily organ of an individual *Homo sapiens*, growing out of his neck at the mercy of Mother Nature, but precisely the *human* head – a tool of *culture*, not of nature. The ideal is not concealed in the heads of people. Its body does not consist only of the brain, but also of any thing that is created by people for people. Products of culture are nothing but 'the organs of the human brain created by the human hand, the reified power of knowledge', Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, the thinking thing is not the individual with her brain, but the collective as it idealises the material and materialises the ideal.

Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal helps us to address Bonefeld's question – 'What constitutes the relation between 'human practice' and the 'perverted and disenchanted world' of capitalism?'<sup>80</sup> – in an anti-reductionist way, that is, in a way that neither fetishises the conditions of struggle (as *OM* accuses closed Marxism of doing), nor occludes these conditions or insist that understanding their 'logic' necessarily involves their fetishism. In a manner prefiguring *OM*, Ilyenkov recognises the centrality of practice and grasps the ideal in general as a form of that practice. However, his formulation also helps us to recognise the impact of the objective form of previous practice upon activity in the present. From the perspective of Ilyenkov's post-Cartesian anti-dualism, both struggle and the conditions in which struggle takes place are moments of human activity, and whatever independent 'logic' they might appear to exhibit is ultimately a product of that activity. However, he also helps us to develop a nuanced appreciation of the 'weight of history' – how we make our history under conditions inherited from what had been made by previous generations. Marx understood these conditions in the first instance as a mode of production – a set of practices that exhibit certain patterns that can be studied and for which, on that basis, certain predictions can be made, assuming the continuity of these practices. When these patterns appear to have an autonomous existence beyond human activity, they become fetishised. However, Ilyenkov's concept of the ideal enables us to examine these patterns as being both practice and object, as objective activity following the objective contours of the conditions of struggle, which have been produced by previous activity. In this way, we are able to avoid not only the objectivism of which *OM* correctly accuses certain approaches in Marxism, but also the subjectivism of which *OM* has likewise been accused.

78. Ilyenkov 1974, pp. 31–2.

79. Maidansky 2005, p. 290.

80. Bonefeld 1995, p. 185.

More broadly, Ilyenkov's post-Cartesian anti-dualism points to a way forward for anti-postmodernist theorists who are equally critical of positivism. His approach forms an interesting blend of Spinozist and Hegelian Marxism, which yields insights that are pertinent to current theoretical issues in the West. More specifically, I have used Ilyenkov's work to critically reflect on a set of debates on structure and agency from the journal *Open Marxism* and found in the work of John Holloway. Ilyenkov's reading of Marx has a lot of affinities with *OM*, and it also helps to address some of the recent criticisms of *OM*'s subjectivism.

I have sought to show how the dominant categories of our intellectual histories – Western Marxism and Soviet Marxism – exclude the subterranean tradition of creative Soviet Marxism. It is my hope that this chapter (and this volume as a whole) helps to draw attention to the value of this body of work.

Part Four

**Supplementary Material**





# Bibliography of Evald Ilyenkov's Works

This bibliography is based on the list compiled by A.G. Novokhatko, completed later by Andrey Maidansky for his Ilyenkov webpage: [www.caute.ru/ilyenkov/opera.html](http://www.caute.ru/ilyenkov/opera.html).

Besides the Russian original texts, only English, German, Italian and Spanish translations are noted here. Ilyenkov's works have also been published in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Punjab, Czech, Finnish and Polish.

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